A WOMAN IN THE SAHARA

HELEN C. GORDON

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A WOMAN IN THE SAHARA

AN ARAB GIRL

From a Painting by Lys Forster

A Woman in the Sahara

BY

HELEN C. GORDON

WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN COLOUR AND 16 ILLUSTRATIONS IN MONOTONE

"Beautiful Days of Sand and Sun"

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DEDICATION

Hail to thee, O Sun! Not the pale reflexion of thyself that fitfully illumines the blue skies of Northern Europe or glooms, a ball of dusky red, through grey cold mist and fog; but thou indeed! a superb, luminous, hot sun set in a heaven so radiant, so opalescent, that this plateau in another continent; this oasis, on a wide stretch of table-land, lifted out of sand wastes and arid rocky plains; bathed in the fulness of thy glory, seems outside our waking hours, where we may be transported only in our dreams.

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GLOSSARY

Âbaïa, Sort of blouse worn by women.
Abka âla Kheir, Good-bye.
Achoûrâ, Festival.
Aïd-el-Kebir, The great feast.
Allahou akber, God is the greatest.

Bahut, Coffer.
Baraka, The sacred force.
Bendir(s), bnader(pl), Tomtom.
Berkoûks, Pellets of a kind of couscous.
Besqa, A game of cards.
Bidi, Fine Burnous.
Bismîllah, Blessing before killing animals or game: grace before meat.
Bourriquot, Popular name for an Algerian donkey.
Burnous, Cloak, with a hood like a friar's, worn by men.

Caïd, Arab functionary who acts as intermediary between Government officials and the natives.
Cadi, Judge.
Chechia, Fez.
Cherchem, Dish of beans.
Chérif, Nobleman.
Couscous, Grains of flour.
Couscous or Couscousou, The national dish.

Dashera, A Berber village.
Defla, Oleanders.
Dhour, Second prayer of the day.
Diffa, Banquet: repast.
Djedouel, Amulet.
Djeldjâla, Golden drops.

Djemmâ, Mosque: club. *Lit.* Meeeting-house.
Djinn, Devil.
Dokana(s), dokanat(pl), Stone bench to lie on.

El-Eugmi, Palm wine.
El Hadj, The pilgrim (to Mecca).
El Hamel, The lost one.
El Kadr, The night of unalterable decision.
El Oued, The river.
El R'Orab, The crow.
Emshi, Go.
Emshi besselema, Go in peace: good-bye.
Ennaïr, Fête of the New Year.

Fantasia, Fête: frivolity.
Fedjer, Prayer at dawn.
Fellah, Tiller of the soil.
Feloudj(s) feloudji(pl), Tent covering.
Filali, Red leather riding boots.
Fondouk, Stables: an Arab inn.
Fouta, Pinafore frock.

Gandoura(s) Guenader(pl), Sleeveless shirt worn by men, also an underfrock worn by women.
Gherîb, Strange; stranger.
Goum, Mounted troop; followers of a chieftain.
Goumier, Soldier.
Guémira, Pyramidal sign post.

Habibka, Friend.
Hadida, Preparation for dyeing the hair.
Haïk, Head covering which frames the face.
Halib, Milk.
Henneh, Cosmetic for the nails and hands.
Herz, A talisman: a preservative.

Iman, Reader in a mosque.
Inshallah or *In châh Allah,* God willing.
Irâthen (Kabyle), Pedlars.

Ja, Yes.
Jemmal, Camel driver.

Keskâs, Perforated cooking pot.
Khaloûk, Rouge.
Khams, Charm: hand of Fatima.
Khamsa, Five.
Kharedjites, Those who go out (from orthodoxy).
Khouan, Brother of a religious order.
Khouime, The fifth.
Kif, Preparation of opium for smoking.
Koh'eul, Black powder: a cosmetic.
Koûba, Mausoleum.
Koûra, Game of ball.
Ksar, Headquarters of a tribe: a village.

L'Aser, Prayer at dawn.
Leben, Curdled milk.
Lélla, Madame: lady.
'Lhamdoulah, Thanks be to God. Please God.
Louga, Short veil.

Ma'iân, Person reputed to have the evil eye.
Makhzen, Cavaliers du, Arab soldiers wearing a blue burnous.
Maroued, Silver ornament to hold koh'eul.
Medersa, College.
Méhari, Quick trotting camel.
Méhariste, Rider on a camel.
Mekhtoume, Wine of Paradise.
Mektoub rebbi, It was written.
Melh'afa(s) melah'af(pl), Large piece of stuff worn by women wound twice round the body and fastened on the shoulders, or else put right over the head to cover them all over.
Melqa r rabî, Festival of spring.
Mendil(s) mendilat(pl), Kerchief covering the head.
Mesh'we, Sheep roasted whole.
Met'rek, Thick stick carried by nomads.
Mihrâb, Niche in a Mosque pointing to the East.
Mimbar, Pulpit in a Mosque.
Mogh'reb, Prayer at sunset: the West: Morocco.
Mokhazni, Soldiers of the blue burnous.

Mou'abbir, Pious man able to read and write.
Mouhaîmn, Guardian.
Mouloud, The Prophet's birthday.
M'rabet(m) M'rabta(f), Head of a religious order by hereditary right only.
Muezzin, The crier from the minaret.

Nakhla, Palm tree: a girl's name.
Nazil, A newcomer.
Nefs, Soul: breath.

Oua Aleikoume Esselema, And with you peace.
Ouali, Saint: friend of God.
Oued, River.

Quaïta, Flute.

Ramadhane, The great fast.
Regoûba, Circle, or horseshoe of stones.
Rhiqi, Wine of Paradise.
Roba, Woman's dress.
Roumi(m) roumya(f) rouama(pl), Stranger: Christian.
Rouh bel'afia, Good-bye.

Sahfa, Large shallow dish.
Salamoune âleïkoume Esseleme, Peace be unto you.
Shouf, Show; look.
Si, Mr.
Sidi, Sir.
Sirath, The bridge which spans hell.
Smoq, Magic ink.
Soff, Political party.
Sokhab, Tiara of coins.
Soudouk, Box.
Spahi, Soldier with red burnous and vest.

T'aleb, A scholar.
Tellis, Sack for loading up a camel.
Tenebria, Decree of banishment.
Tolba, Clergy.

Zaouïa, Koranic College.
Zerda, Banquet of charity.

PART I

ON A PLATEAU

CHAPTER I

THE PLACE OF HAPPINESS

"Comme toutes les villes du désert . . . bâti sur un plan simple, qui consiste à diminuer l'espace au profit de l'ombre. C'est un composé de ruelles, de corridors, d'impasses, de fondouks."

E. FROMENTIN.

"Un marché arabe . . . est, en effet, un des musées les plus curieux qu'on puisse offrir à l'analyse d'un observateur attentif."

C. RICHARD.

"Il est curieux de constater l'universalité, de la croyance dans tous les ages et dans toutes les races, que l'homme a été créé avec la poussière, des pierres, de la substance minérale."

September 30th, 1912.

WE arrived more than a fortnight ago, Lisette and I, after a very tiring journey from Paris to Algiers, for which we were amply compensated, after turning our backs on that somewhat disappointing port, by the ten hours' drive to this far away fairyland, 150 miles from the maddening crowd.

Even in Africa the morning of the 14th was cloudy and damp; and as I sleepily began to ponder whether my quest in search of the sun was, after all, fruitless — if, perhaps, he were on strike here as he had been in Europe throughout the whole of a miserable summer — I was hurried out of bed to dress and pack before seven o'clock, and by eight we were already out of sight of the sea, en route in a motor car for the Place of Happiness. During that hour we had followed the coast line a very short distance on a flat and uninteresting road, and this enabled us to get properly settled and well rolled up in our rugs before the auto bore off to the right and our attention was diverted from our comfort to the scenery.

We looked out now upon well-wooded heights on the one hand; on the other, down steep declivities, with not always too much margin beyond the car as we wound round and upwards into the mountains, on a fine road and well kept that would in itself sustain, if necessary, the world-wide reputation of French engineers. Across the ravines were other hills; and now and again, through a gap, we could catch glimpses of a range still more distant. Then we descended suddenly; turned a somewhat sharp corner and climbed up endlessly to arrive in grey cloudland, where it was drizzling; and to our annoyance the whole of the landscape, beneath and around, was blotted out by the rain.

At last we simply ran away: out of this chill, cheerless region down to a level where the rain

could not follow us, but only the scent, on the soft damp air, of eucalyptus and pine. A genial warmth crept into the atmosphere, and after we had sped quickly through one or two small Arab villages, the sun condescended to emerge from the clouds as we arrived at Aumale, which lies outside the fringe of that magical country he claims for his own.

Here, one-half of our journey completed, we cried a halt, both being famished after our long morning in the mountains; so the sight of an inn was welcome, even if in itself it looked hardly attractive. However, we had an excellent breakfast and a rest for a couple of hours; for there is nothing to see in the little town on the spurs of Jebel Dira: its glory as an important station on the Roman road to Mauretania having departed long since with its ancient name of Auzia.

At two o'clock we started on our last stage, and presently found ourselves in the midst of an unknown, strange land, yet most curiously familiar, of course, owing to its resemblance to biblical scenes; recalling passages in the history of patriarchs and prophets and of the forty years the Israelites wandered in the arid wilderness of Shur. Many a beautiful painting I had seen came back to memory, but not one in which had been faithfully reproduced *these* colours, or *this* light.

Sometimes we overtook a caravan of dromedaries and their attendant *jemmals*.[1] So much a part of the landscape were they that no one could doubt

[1] Camel drivers.

they were born of it. Not growing slowly with years, but fashioned at once as they stood: the men changed from the stones of the wayside into children of Abraham, the breath of life breathed into their nostrils; the beasts, with their long, supple necks and high humps moulded suddenly out of the earth.

What marvellous earth! It varied in delicate pastel shades from white — faintly tinted — to citron, deep lemon, ochre, tawny yellow, dark brown: and the flints bestrewing it supplied the cold note of stone colour: while the occasional pasturage, where sheep and goats grazed, its herbs lightly powdered with fine dust, was grey-green as one neared it and pale réséda from afar off.

For long intervals there was not a sign of life anywhere: nothing moved save ourselves, not a figure or creature: not a leaf stirred of the infrequent trees under a cloudless blue heaven, for the fresh breeze of the morning, outside the boundary line wherein dwells enchantment, had died on the threshold, afraid to dispute the kingdom of atmosphere with so jealous a sun. Soon the peaks of the tawny brown mountains were aflame with his glory; and, in the west, the blue of the sky was lost in a glow of rose colour and purple; in the warmth of his regal good-night to the world ere he sank to his bed in vast wastes of sand dunes, shifting and golden.

We put on speed now, to reach our destination before evening, and swung round the base of a hill, jutting out like a promontory, which conceals the

Place of Happiness from the long level road, just as some last rays caught the sugar cone top of a *koûba:* the white plaster tomb of a saint, which stands peacefully sentinel by the wayside at the main approach to the town. Five minutes more brought us into the big Market Square, chased by a crowd of tatterdemalions shouting the names of the inns —"Petit Sahara" or "l'Oasis"— with the full strength of their lungs.

As soon as we were sufficiently rested we began to explore the town, which bewildered me at first and I felt in a maze; for the little alleys exist only to oblige the houses crowded together in a mass built, apparently, anywhere, facing this way, or that, without rhyme or reason. Often we chose out a promising passage only to find our progress suddenly stopped by the door of some private abode, or by a blank wall. What lay behind? Looking up at a barred aperture, perhaps only the vacant stare of emptiness met our gaze; but we might be rewarded by the glimpse of a braceletted arm, or a half-veiled face, speedily withdrawn. Large doors, ajar, afforded mysterious peeps into gloomy roofed corridors, propped up with rude joists: whither did they lead? The little alleys were sometimes so steep that they naturally resolved themselves into steps, and we climbed up with the idea of getting a view, but when we arrived at the top were just as much shut in by high walls, houses, or weird-looking courts, filled with camels and *bourriquots.*[2]

[2] Popular name for the Algerian donkey.

At last we decided that the Ghetto, where the Jews have their synagogue, was the main artery, from which trunk issues several branches: sometimes warped and bending back to end in a triangular fork — an open three-cornered space, with, or without other outlets — or else ending in futile twigs, cut off short — paths leading nowhere. The trunk road itself soon narrows into a tortuous lane descending slowly to high-walled gardens, below which runs the river, with artificial banks, banded in on both sides by hundreds of date palms; and beyond that stretches a desert of sand.

Where the slope begins, the street obligingly bends its back, almost into a semi-circle, animated no doubt by a feeling of politeness to the Mosque, which has taken an outward curve in the course of years. It is the oldest Mahomedan temple in the town; built on a little hill that lifts it out of the chaos of mud houses, so that its highest terrace commands a wide view of roofs: some high, some low, square, or rectangular, ranging in shade from white that is dingy, to dust colour and grey, but occasionally bright crimson with a thickly strewn carpet of chilis dyed red by the sun.

Coming down from our survey, past the schoolroom whence issued a drowsy murmur of young voices, to the door of the sanctuary itself, we contented ourselves with a passing glance, for an *iman* [3] was reading aloud, and turned into the twilight of a long roofed-in descending corridor, lined on one side

[3] A pious man appointed to read in the Mosques.

with *dokanat,*[4] each the length of a man. All were occupied by white-robed figures making simultaneously the prescribed genuflexions and we crept quickly and quietly by as they humbly prostrated themselves in prayer. Out again then, into the sunshine of the little court, where a palm-tree leans against the curving walls and a little space is set apart for a bier and assigned to the last friend of the dead.

. . . . . .

On our homeward way we looked over several empty huts, for Lisette was in search of a studio in which to paint Arab interiors. Some have only one floor, flush with the ground; or, it would be more correct to say that a portion of bare earth has been walled in with mud and, within this enclosure, a stone way leads through the half-open roof to the terrace above. There are many more important dwellings, however, with an upper story and a tiny balcony, or a flight of rickety wooden steps outside to the ground for the benefit of the top floor family.

In the oldest, most congested part of the town there are picturesque projections which jut out to rest the more securely on the edge of a friendly wall opposite. They thus form a wide shelter and, as a natural consequence, an Arab Club — a *djemmâ,*[5] where the men meet, usually to gossip and

[4] Stone benches.

[5] Literally a meeting place.

loaf, though one member may bring a baby to mind and another his sewing.

For here, as always in the East, it is the men who wield the needle, squatting with their backs against the lintels of the doors and using their toes for the winding of cotton or silk. Looking into the little windowless cubicles which line the Jew street, they can be seen embroidering the high backs of Arab saddles, purses, or fans. In other alleys may be heard the whir-r-r of sewing machines, with toilers working from dawn to dusk perched on uncomfortable chairs.

The women, apart from their household affairs, fined down to simplicity itself, work at weaving the *burnous*,[6] which is stretched on a frame reaching nearly across the hut — practically the only piece of furniture it contains. They squat on the ground, as many as three in a row, and work away in the semi-darkness; automatically, it must be supposed, since many are blind of one eye at least, for ophthalmia is painfully prevalent everywhere.

The house Lisette has hired (for four francs a month) is a fair specimen of most one-storied huts. The outer apartment, sunk a little below the road level, is rectangular in shape, with its centre exposed to whatever weather it please Heaven to send. The roof at either end is propped up with rude palm-tree posts, and a hearth has been hollowed out beneath a hole through which a fraction of smoke from the fire finds means of escape. This, with an

[6] Long mantle with a hood shaped like a friar's.

*un*cosy corner of stone which fits the angle facing the door, may be called the only fixtures the landlord provides.

Adjoining this shed (for it is little else, affording shelter for donkeys and mules as well as men) is the women's apartment — a long, narrow cell without any aperture for light or air save the smoke-hole of their hearth: a fell trap for any heedless stray sunbeams which are caught and imprisoned in the blackness beneath.

Yet the studio has its charms. The walls, sun-dried and smoked by the hearth fires to an unique, nameless, composite tone, makes a beautiful background for gorgeous, many-hued draperies, when the golden light streams in upon the posturing models. Everything is so delightfully irresponsible: so out of the usual and, especially, of the perpendicular: walls, roof, joists, and, above all, the palm-tree door, which is a joy with huge beams lengthwise and athwart, and a lock such as Noah probably used when he bolted himself and his family into the Ark. It is made of two pieces of wood, one of which, ten inches long by four wide, is attached vertically to the door and is hollowed out in the centre with a little ledge, having three holes wherein repose an equal number of wooden nails with large heads. The hollow receives into it a bolt, also of wood, an inch and a half wide and as long as you like, with three holes into which the nails drop and the door is effectually locked. It is under these holes that, to open the door, a wooden comb — or should

I say key? — with three teeth, is inserted vertically and fiddled with, till the nails are forced up and the bolt is released. This operation may, or may not, sound simple, but in effect it is most complicated, and haste is fatal! Taking this into consideration, together with the weight of the door, which is beyond thinking, I have fully determined that should I ever be imprisoned behind one, my only chance of escape will be out through the roof, or over the walls, however undignified such modes of exit.

Of course the house was badly in need of repair, and would still be unmended, had it not been for the insistence of Sidi Silîman, who was called in to the rescue. Now the masons have gone; the last one, with a kindly thoughtfulness, which we much appreciate, having planted his open hand deep in the wet mud over the doorway, as a certain protection to us all from the baleful glance of an evil eye.

Horseshoes and crescents are common enough, and horns are also renowned for their magical gift of repulsion; but the power of the open hand, with its outspread five fingers, is in the highest repute to shield one from the envious piercing look of a *ma'iân*,[7] who, viper-like, can discharge an invisible poison, deadly enough to break a stone into pieces, or, worse still, take human life.

By the time the studio was in readiness, I had learned which paths to take, and which to avoid. Also that, facing westwards, all roads led into the

[7] Person reputed to have the evil eye.

Market Square, at the most distant corner of which stands our hotel, where from the vantage-ground of my balcony, I see the life — that is, the active man's life — of the town, like a character play, being enacted and reënacted beneath and around me.

Looking out, to my left, is a wide sweep of roadway bending round and upward, above which, through trees, I get a peep of the Fort; built high on a ledge of solid rock to command the European quarter, and with public gardens which form the north side of the Square. Where the gardens cease, lies the road to Algiers, its other side flanked by the little, low shops of M'Zabite traders: their shelves stocked with bright-coloured muslins and silks, boots of sheepskin dyed yellow or red, coffers and purses, fans to chase away eyeflies, and long knives in their rose-coloured sheaths. These buildings form a boundary line north and east broken by the chief street of the Ghetto and by two alleys, out of my range of vision.

To-day, Monday, high market is held; and round a fountain shaded by trees, of which I can just get a glimpse, the vendors of various fruits of the earth are squatted, or lying, amongst garden produce, which, spread over the ground in wonderful oriental disorder, of course is attracting millions of flies. Apricots, peaches, and especially grapes, there are in profusion — great purple bunches costing a trifle; and beautiful dates, for this place vies with the south in the quality of the rich brown fruit, which divides, like a wreath, the green plumes of the palm-

trees. "Every day brings its bread," says the Arab, with unquestioning faith in a bountiful Providence; but, seemingly, so pressed are these gardeners for the wherewithal to obtain it, that apricots and pomegranates are, alas! spoiled by being plucked long before they are ripe.

The other half of the poor population are keepers of sheep; and as a herd is driven across the Square there ensues a scene of wildest confusion, for, at the north road, they fall in with a drove of dromedaries, laden with brown sacks of grain and great piles of merchandise, bound for the Messageries' Office in the colonnade of the inn.

The air resounds with a rumbling murmur of strange tongues: of guttural throat articulations, raised only above a monotone when a serious quarrel is in progress and such phrases as, "Son of a dog!" "Accursed son of an accursed father!" are bandied about; or an Arab from the plains calls a Kabyle, "Eater of acorns!" [8] in contempt and derision.

Vendors and buyers are garbed, for the greater part, in a white *gandoura,* a long, sleeveless shirt; over which is worn a *burnous,* most usually the natural colour of the sheep from whose fleece it is woven; but, ever and anon, the eye is caught by the bright blue, or heliotrope, or yellow shirt of some lad; a crimson-shrouded form skirting the edge of a group of unheeding men; or the scarlet petticoat

[8] The acorns of the mountains are almost as nice as chestnuts.

bordered with purple or green of an unveiled Jewess.

An Arab from the south wears a black *burnous,* and the olive tint of his skin strikes a medium note between complexions rivaling the whiteness of Europe and those of a swarthiness which betokens the mixture of Moorish blood; while the half-naked hide of the negro Bou-Saâdïas [9] is like polished jet, as to the strumming of tomtoms, with hideous grimaces and weird barbaric gestures, they perform a wild dance for the benefit of the crowd. The drum of the Jew town-crier beats a loud tatoo in opposition; and attention is further diverted by the arrival of an archaic diligence, painted orange and green, dragged across the Square by six weary horses.

Lounging, or sitting outside the cafés near the fountain, or promenading in twos and threes, are the prosperous idlers; beautifully attired, for, "please yourself in what you eat, but others in what you wear," says the Arab; so his white haïk [10] is adjusted to a nicety over his *chechia* [11] and bound with coils of brown camel's hair. Monday is a lucky day to put on a new garment, for it is sure to attract a "blessing from heaven." His *burnous,* therefore, which he carries with such dignity, is spotless: dyed to some colour he particularly fancies: some shade

[9] Jolly fellows.

[10] Piece of white linen carried up the back of the neck and over the head.

[11] Sort of red fez.

of cinnamon, ginger or clove; of the blue grape; of red wine; of dates; or, of pomegranate juice.

Meanwhile the sun has risen high in the heavens. The beggar, whose frequent *"Ah ja!"* [12] commencing some verse from the Koran which woke me at six, has dragged his legless self painfully across the Square and is at last silent. For a couple of hours past many swathed mummy-like forms have been ranged in a row beneath the shade of the trees, which droop over the palisade of the Gardens. Gradually the hubbub, the loud tomtoms, the sounds of bartering, of anger, have died down and ceased. The crowd has dispersed. Few figures pass beneath my windows now; but, ever and anon, some stray Mussulmen stoop to perform their ablutions in the little stream of fresh water which runs along the line of roadway; then, they also cross, to sit upon the benches opposite and wait. The Square, save for them and the sleepers, is empty. My clock points to close upon three. It is *L'Aser.*[13] Listen! On the hot air is borne faintly, from the north and the east, a long-drawn-out, plaintive appeal. *"Allah-o-u — Ak-ber."* [14] Then peace. The faithful are at prayer.

[12] Oh, yes!

[13] The 3rd invocation of the day.

[14] God is great.

CHAPTER II

THE DIFFA

" C'est dans les moeurs arabes un acte sérieux de manger et de donner à manger, et une diffa est une haute leçon de savoir vivre, de générosité, de prévenances mutuelles." FROMENTIN.

October 11th, 1913.

WERE I to say that we went out to dinner last night, it would by no means convey any idea of the unique entertainment at which we were present. As a matter of fact, we attended a *diffa,*[1] given in honour of the few European strangers who have met in this out of the way corner of the globe.

It had rained slightly during the day and the evening was cloudy, so Lisette's boy, Abdurahman (whom she employs to carry her easel and play at being a servant) was told to borrow the hotel lamp and escort us at a quarter to seven. However, at the eleventh moment, when we were starting, he announced that he could not light it because it had not been charged, so we left him behind and sallied forth in the dark. It was all well enough in the Square, thanks to the French chemist's and grocer's

[1] Repast: banquet.

shops, but after we passed the big communal school at the corner, we had to climb up a path of ill paved stairway, leading under a wide arch, with a weird, uncanny corridor on the left: a fitting promenade for ghosts and *djinns*.[2] When we reached it we were relieved to find a wall lamp above our heads, throwing a welcome light here, and making darkness more visible beyond; but, gathering our finery about us, we plunged into black night, groped our way round a nasty corner, and emerged into our last alley, where we found servants with lanterns awaiting the guests.

The house to which we were bidden was built by a late Caïd on a plan very general for homes of the wealthy in towns of the oasis. The high door, painted green, led directly into a square courtyard round which ran the servants' quarters and the stables. We crossed to its farthest corner and climbed up some very steep and rough stone steps which led to the terrace above. Here were some rooms and beyond them an arched gallery divided by pillars into two compartments open to the east. In the narrowest portion stood a dining table with covers for the nine guests assembled in the lounge, amongst whom were three painters of oriental life and scenery; an officer of the garrison; and a naturalist, who has been living amongst Maoris for some years, studying creeping things in New Zealand and has now transferred his microscopic attentions to North African creatures. He is putting up at our hotel

[2] Devils.

and we had not been long in discovering his occupation, for he had hardly arrived when his boy let a scorpion escape, and whilst the whole staff of the inn was hunting for it, I found that a family of tortoises led by papa and mamma had climbed out of their bucket and were en route for my bedroom. However, we bore him no grudge on account of his disagreeable pets, and we were all known to each other except the Arab guests: a magistrate and a poet, whose beautiful clothing, enhanced by the decorations presented by a grateful Government for their services, quite put the rest of us into the shade.

Whether it was the novelty of the cooking, I cannot say, but the food — all à l'Arabe — seemed to me the most delicious I had ever tasted; though it was somewhat satisfying and, to my regret, I was obliged to let one dish pass me by untasted.

Thick soup had been followed by a ragoût of mutton, vegetables and fruits, and the servant was really so hospitable and kind in pointing out special delicacies, which I must take, that my helping became far more liberal than I ever intended, or could eat.

Couscousou, the next course, is the national dish, and on that account as well as because it is worth it, deserves special mention. The main ingredient is very fine flour, put into a large wooden platter, called a *sahfa,* over which water is poured and the mixture rolled by hand into little ivory-white seeds. It is then shaken through a sieve and allowed to

dry; after which it can be kept for a year or so. When cooking, the *couscousou* is steamed through a vessel [3] pierced with holes over a saucepan of boiling water, or soup; and at this *diffa* the tiny white grains were served alone, followed by a rich gravy to be poured over them, according to taste.

Then ensued a slight pause in the proceedings till my neighbours gave me a hint to look round in time to witness the arrival of a sheep impaled on long skewers, roasted whole and reposing on a huge brass platter, borne up the steps by two servants. Who has not eaten mutton thus prepared has no idea how good mutton really is! The Arabs are greatly to be congratulated on this discovery, even if we do not concede to them the "invention of roast beef," claimed on their behalf by a French writer, who asserts it is impertinent of us to consider it ours. "How pretentious some people are!" says he.

Until this moment, whatever our food and its preparation, our table customs had been strictly European, else had we all been squatting on mats round a table no higher than a stool, each armed with a wooden spoon, helping ourselves to soup, or ragoût, or *couscousou,* from one large platter in our midst, accessible to all. Etiquette lays down that each guest should take only a portion from the edge of the dish nearest himself, leaving the centre to the finish. Moreover, some choice morsels should remain untouched that the blessing of Heaven may de-

[3] Keskâs.

scend on the repast, and were a *M'rabet*[4] present, he would certainly spit on them, for saliva, especially that of the pious, is charged with *baraka,* the sacred force.

However, with the serving of the *mesh'we*[5] which had been placed by the servants on a circular table, we, of the West, departed from our usual habits, rose from the festive board at which we had been seated and, surrounding the sheep, picked off pieces with our fingers — knives and forks being strictly prohibited! This reminded me a little of the snap-dragon of my youth, for the meat was hot and frizzling, and it was a very amusing entertainment, which the Arabs alone took most seriously. With all due care, too, it was a messy business and necessitated a little troop of domestics armed with soap, tiny towels fringed with pink, a brass basin and a beautiful chased ewer; so, on the whole it was a comfort to play at Arab fashions only throughout one course and after our ablutions to return to our original table for European dessert and champagne. The Prophet strictly forbade his followers to drink wine, and one tradition alone, out of many, will suffice to show what a dangerous folly it is considered.

A woman, who wished to test the extent of her power over her lover and his affection for her, asked him to commit three crimes for her dear sake. At first he was resolute in his refusals, but in time

[4] Holy man: the head (by heredity only) of a Mussulman Order.
[5] Sheep roasted whole.

she so worked upon him that he yielded to the point of promising to break one law, and took wine, believing that to be the least of the three sins she had suggested, with the fatal and inevitable result that, when he was drunk, he committed the other two.

Even at a *diffa,* milk is the correct beverage: either sweet (*halib*) or curdled with some preparation that is put into it; but the Arabs of our party had been for long emancipated from all such old-fashioned notions; and, as the Commandant wickedly remarked, filling up the while a bumper for the Caïd, "We all know it turns to *leben*[6] in your throat!" This jest provoked smiles from all the European guests, but throughout the evening the Arabs preserved an impassive demeanour. Not that they are lacking in a sense of humour — far from it — but they prefer, and quite naturally, that the joke should be at our expense, not theirs. At the carnivals in the interior, at Touggourt and Ouargla, I am told it is no uncommon sight to be treated to excellent and most amusing imitations of the clothes, manners, and foibles of the tourists, especially of the English.

It is curious to find that a people, entirely negligent of detail in their buildings, their furniture, their household arrangements, not to mention sanitation and personal hygiene, should be so extraordinarily observant and interested in the most delicate minutiæ of character and physiognomy. Nor do they rest content with an examination of the face

[6] Curdled milk.

alone: the walk and the figure of an individual convey to them definite traits of the mind, which they have a quick instinct to grasp. Well-proportioned eyes, they say, denote wisdom; those elongated at the corners, extravagance and folly. Heavy eyebrows show a jealous disposition. A big nose is always an object of raillery and a story is told of a wooing by a man thus sadly afflicted. He was enumerating his virtues to the object of his affections and included amongst them his ability to endure the trials of life with stoicism. "There is no doubt of that," said the beloved one, "or you could never have borne such a nose for forty years."

If their reading of the features is to be relied upon, one of the Cadis must be an excellent magistrate, a "wise and upright judge," and the wide black beard the poet wears is a sign of high thinking!

Whilst we were finishing this very good dinner, *'lhamdoulah!* [7] the rain clouds had dispersed and the flicker and flare of the candles, blown about by the breeze, had gradually paled in the silver radiance of the tropical moonlight. It had sought out the arched entrances of the gallery and crept in, after flooding the terrace and the silent deserted roofs of the houses beneath us. Early though it was in the night, doors were tight shut: good folk were abed in the town. It was we, late noisy revellers, who broke in upon their slumbers with our voices, who set the dogs off in a frenzied chorus, for never do

[7] Grace after meat. "Thanks be to God."

they "bark so loudly as at the doors of their own homes." [8]

Sleep was impossible: the night was too superb! All the mud walls and roofs were coated and steeped in silver and the little paths and alleys lost in deepest mysterious shadow. Our voices had dropped, almost unconsciously, to a whisper and our footfalls no longer resounded firmly on the broken flagstones of the narrow streets. Now a wraith suddenly brushed by and vanished into a door left ajar for its coming; and again, a form, more silent than we with its unshod feet, seemed to emanate from a wall, appeared for a moment, then glided out of sight. Presently we came to a triangle where the buildings fell apart leaving a space in their midst, brilliantly lit up; so we stood, looking, admiring — watching, listening. For what — what was that? Nearer it came. The sharp click of a booted heel: the clank of a sword; and without further warning a figure in full uniform swung round a corner straight into the light: stopped dead, hesitated, saluted. "Good-night!" "Good-night!" to one for whom there would be no Good-morrow. Could we have turned his steps? Of what avail? *Mektoub rebbi!* "It was written"; so he passed on to his destiny and we, suddenly weary, faced homewards.

We had ceased talking now. From time to time clouds passed over the face of the moon and it grew very dark; so that we had to go slowly along, and we trod softly not to arouse the dogs on the roofs or

[8] Arab Proverb.

behind the closed doors. The only sounds on the sultry air were those of night birds on the wing. It was so close it seemed as if a storm must break. At length we reached the Market Square and caught at each other as the stillness was broken by a long, eerie, plaintive moan. Oh! Only a dog baying at the moon just emerging again from behind a passing cloud. Three times we heard it. Then deep silence. The town slept.

CHAPTER III

EL OUED

"There's a bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream."
"Faire le thé, c'est ici une besogne d'homme, et d'homme libre."
"DANS L'OMBRE CHAUDE DE L'ISLAM."

October 28th, 1912.

WE made an expedition to-day, one of mixed joys, by and through the river which comes hence from the south, passing the Moulin Ferrero, whither we were bound, then finding its way amidst hills and palm gardens along the base of the town in an irregular boundary line, till it bends at a sharp angle to lose itself once more in a land deserted and mysterious.

Do not picture a rush, or any depth of water: far from it. El Oued has been that always perhaps in the past: even in this century has overflowed its banks and worked havoc in the gardens; but to-day, it ran a quiet, harmless stream, with scarce a ripple: a thing of shallows in a bed, sometimes of sand, sometimes of loose pebbles, with masses of grey granite piled up here and there on either side of it and great clumps of *defla* [1] which, in due season, will burst forth in a glory of rose-coloured bloom.

[1] Oleanders.

Kindly lent by Mrs. Mathews

Cave Dwellings near the River

Too far to walk, and nothing available to help shank's mare over the ground but a donkey, with a man's saddle at least two sizes too large for it and, what is called here a *bourriquot.* In attendance Lisette's boy, the donkey's boy, also its proud owner who "would not sell it for one hundred francs," a French youth, Gaston, long of body and short of leg in a blue blouse and corduroys. Somehow — perhaps by courtesy, or by luck, or by choice — the bigger of the two donkeys fell to my share; and, always loathing discomfort, I doubtfully surveyed its back, covered with sacking over which was bound a torn red cotton cloth, plus iron stirrups roped to each other but attached to nothing else. Lisette, on the contrary, quite happy, looking forward to getting astride, but agreeable to postpone mounting till we were well out of sight of the town; so we maintained our dignity down the principal street and the steep slope which leads to the river.

With the aid of the boys and a handy rock I inelegantly scrambled on to my steed, too much absorbed in my own doings to notice Lisette, until I saw her turn a somersault in the air and land flat on her back on the further side of her donkey, which stood stock still, head down to earth, bonnetted with the saddle. Not hurt, luckily, and quite undismayed, she mounted again, and was on the lookout now for tricks as we ambled along, sometimes through pools, sometimes over boulders, sometimes on a long stretch of soft sand.

Now and again we fell in with a busy group of Jewesses or Arab women, out for a day's work and pleasure combined. To go to the river to wash means a picnic, thoroughly enjoyed, especially by the latter who are so much confined to their dark little mud homes.

Sending on the boys and the donkeys, we halted awhile opposite a large party, and sat down to rest on a high bank near a declivity of the road, where blasting operations had taken place, altering the landscape and strewing the path with amethyst dust from the rocks, against a wide bed of gold-coloured sand. Four slender palm-trees, like pillars, all that are left of the grove that once stood there, lent us their scant shade from the glare of the noonday; and so silent was it that a chameleon crept out, then stopped, scenting danger: the while a faint flush of pink-violet, the tint of the stone dust, suffused the transparent pale grey of its skin. The birds of the desert circled above and perched on the bushes beside us. A new friend I have made, Abdallah-ben-Sayïa (aged twelve), has told me that the Arabs are forbidden to kill these brown, sparrow-like little creatures, with a dash of mauve in their plumage and bright coral-pink bills. Their lives are sacred because their progenitor was a *M'rabet* who was such a shocking liar that Allah, in his wrath, turned him into a bird, with the gift of foretelling by his chirrup the return of an absent friend or relative. Heard close to the ear, said Abdallah, with great

earnestness, this prophecy never fails to come true; so evidently the punishment meted out to the mendacious *M'rabet* has been admirably effective!

The first swan was also a changeling in consequence of a want of veracity; and the monkey a degenerate man, a wealthy Arab, who became so luxurious and lazy that he preferred to perform his ablutions before prayer in the milk of his numerous goats rather than be at the trouble to fetch water — or sand, the only other alternative permitted to a Mussulman for the purification.

"Ibrahîm! Ibrahîm! Light up the fire!" startled us out of our musings to look at a sprightly young woman clad in blush pink with her *louga*[2] falling around her as a calyx encloses a rose in its heart. Ibrahîm, in his wine-coloured *gandoura*[3] and red fez, heeded her not, too much absorbed in some affairs of his own, crouching near the embers where stood the big pot for the boiling. It generally needs a cuff on the side of the head to enforce on small boys the commands of their elders; but, in this instance, his mother, skirts drawn up round to her knees, bare legged and bare footed, was engaged in the *danse des laveuses,* and we could hear the regular swish, swish, swish, as she stamped the dirt out of wet linen.

She and her sisters and cousins had draped all the flat masses of stone in their neighbourhood with

[2] Veil.

[3] Sleeveless shirt.

melah'af: long pieces of bright-coloured stuff, purple with a wide band of green, or orange, or rose dividing the darker shade horizontally. These are wound twice round the body and fastened up on the shoulders; or are used by the women to envelop themselves, with just one eye peeping out with a shy, saucy, or defiant expression. This party seemed to have brought out the entire contents of their *soudouk,*[4] in which they keep all their belongings. On one side, as yet unwashed, were red frocks, all in one piece with a suggestion of frill at the edge; here and there lay an *aâbaïa,* or blouse, blown out of the pile by the wind, and some sleeveless *guenader* — the shirts of their men; whilst up the bank were spread out tiny garments of babies and children — for Messaoud, just now stuck on a rock like a limpet; for Barkâ and Had'â, half in and half out of the water — scarlet flowers of El Oued.

All these gorgeous hues had for a background mud walls, baked rich brown by the sunshine, and enclosing hill gardens with dense masses of green and waving aigrettes of palm-trees. These again were flanked by the mountains that are sometimes rose-brown, amethyst, or deep ochre, as the light wills it and the fairy clouds overhead veiled with fine powdered grains of unseen golden sand, which, caught up in mid-air by the four winds of Heaven, hang suspended betwixt earth and sky.

We had covered only one half of our journey, and though the sun was just over our heads, we started

[4] Coffers ornamented either with gilt or with painted pictures.

again, following a path through the mountains.

We climbed up and down, down and up, chancing in one of our ascents upon some Arab homes hollowed out of the rock, hidden well out of sight behind bushes, and not a sign of the cave-dwellers themselves. Meanwhile the sun grew hotter and hotter, and we were just looking forward to our luncheon when the boy in charge of the panier, who was astride Lisette's donkey, was suddenly shot off. Away went everything, and we could hear our two bottles of water smashing as they fell.

Fortunately, we could ask for hospitality at the beautiful Mill, which resembles a fragment of some Italian hill town wrenched from its original setting and placed on the banks of an Algerian river. Its present owner was his own architect and the dwelling house is picturesquely planned to fit the projecting rock on which it has its foundations, resting floor by floor on the ledges, with a great hill rising sheer upward behind and a wide courtyard sloping down to El Oued. We crossed this to a flight of stone steps on the left leading to the busy wheel and granary: then stepped on to a terrace like a big table, the connecting link between the day's work and the home life at the other end of the paved passageway.

Up again, on a narrower ledge, we found an Arab family installed. Such a bright, blue-eyed little Berber woman, and so excited was she when we were all ushered in to disturb her privacy! Hastily shrouding herself in her *melh'afa* she bade her hus-

band " mind the house " and deserted him, her baby, and her *burnous* on its frame, to attach herself to our party and take advantage of an unexpected opportunity for an outing.

Another flight of steps took us to the top of the Mill; to its storerooms, full of apples and citrons, and lighted by loopholes commanding the courtyard in case of an Arab attack — useless now, happily, but times were not so peaceful when this picturesque dwelling was constructed.

What a glorious view met our gaze outwards, across to row upon row of mountains, pyramids and peaks stretching far away in the distance! Grouped on the crest of a rounded hill, immediately opposite, was an encampment of Bedouins; their tent poles covered with long brown bands of camel's hair, called *feloudji,* sloping up from the ground to a height of, say, four mètres. Great white dogs, with deep noisy voices, were posted at intervals of the circle, like sentries, which seemed so fearsome that a warning message was sent to the nomads that we were coming to visit them.

They had chosen a very good site for their temporary resting place: near water and with a mill at hand to grind their flour. By just so much has the woman's burden been lightened since the French came to Algeria; with the result, say statistics, that her lord is often glad to content himself with, at the most, two spouses out of the four allowed by the Prophet in an age when the miller and the water-barrel were non-existent, and the duties of wife,

mother, and drudge too overwhelming for one poor human being.

By the time we reached the encampment the dogs, whose "barking does no harm to the clouds," [5] had been tied up and we were able to survey the five tents in safety. The women, alert and delighted, shewing all their beautiful white teeth with welcoming smiles, came forward to meet us, their frightened little ones clinging to them, hiding their faces in their mothers' skirts. One indeed burst into tears and had to be soothed and comforted with pennies. The men, their faces tanned almost to blackness by the fierce light of an eternal tropical sun, simply ignored us. They were lying or lolling about at the apertures of their tents, and certainly sustained the reputation they bear for extreme laziness when not on the march through the desert. Owing to the wonderful elasticity of their knee joints, they are able to continue day in, day out, at an even pace by the side of their heavily laden camels. As they have to endure an excess of fatigue on a minimum allowance of food; are exposed to the fury of the stifling simoon, and to the strange phenomena of mirage with its alluring visions of oases planted with palms and watered by cascades, when perhaps most weary and athirst, it does seem as if, in the intervals of their wanderings, they might be allowed to enjoy a rest cure without it being accounted to them for a sin!

We were taken into a tent to inspect the latest ar-

[5] Arab proverb.

rival in babies. It was a weird and hideous little object, so blue in the face that we asked each other afterwards if, for some unknown reason, it had been artificially coloured; but we ultimately concluded that its unfortunate complexion was due to the pressure of a bandage round the cranium. There were four or five of us crouching under the *feloudji*,[6] grouped round the infant, and very soon the stuffiness became so intolerable that we were forced to curtail the audience and were very glad to emerge and recover an upright attitude; for the tube frocks in which French tailors have dressed us did not permit of our adopting the monkey-like postures, when seated, of our Bedouine friends.

We strolled down the hillside and crossed the river again by stepping-stones leading into the mill garden which stretches, long and narrow, at the base of the mountains, between parallel lines of tall poplars. Here grew every kind of vegetable: onions, pumpkins, carrots, turnips, potatoes. Dividing the beds into sections were small groves of fruit trees: some, their boughs heavily laden with spherical balls turning slowly from green to deep orange: others, a mass of leaves only, bereft some weeks since of their burden of "fruitage forbidden, The golden pomegranate of Eden."

Beyond this, an enclosure of old-fashioned flowers: "those with a long past behind them, linked to humanity by many a gracious act fraught with kindly consolation." Roses grew there, sweet williams,

[6] Tent covering.

sunflowers; and, in a sheltered nook, a few fragrant violets which soft airs had lured into blossom believing this exquisite day of October born of the springtime. It was a sight to awaken nostalgia: an irrepressible longing for the cottage gardens of home in the heart of an exile; quickly followed and tempered by sad recollections of the cold grey skies and rain beaten blossoms of a preceding June.

Here too, despite this glorious sunshine and seeming tranquillity, nature is by no means always in a beneficent mood. Some five years ago El Oued, lashed into fury by the torrential rain and the terrible wind from the desert, rose in great flood; so the miller's wife told us, with lips that trembled at the memory of the surging waters which had invaded her home.

Our hostess gave us each a sweet-scented souvenir in farewell, and we sought our retainers, only to find that they had all gone off in pursuit of Lisette's little devil who, not properly tethered, was enjoying a scamper over the hillside.

However, the three breathless boys soon clattered into the courtyard, having caught the offender; and we mounted again starting homewards just as the sun began to decline so that the rocks threw great purple patches of shadow over the water, such as Corot once painted in masterly fashion, picturing the return of the Prodigal Son.

Presently the wind brought to our ears faintly over the hill to the river bed the chimes of the Fort clock striking the hour, and finding ourselves once

more near the town we dismounted and let the boys take our places. For an Arab to have a steed of any sort raises him immeasurably above the heads of his fellows, and Abdurahman settled himself on my discarded donkey prepared to impress his friends by a state entry, when he was suddenly propelled into a ditch and the hitherto docile bourriquot made a bolt for its stable!

What price donkeys? Going two a penny! No bids.

. . . . . .

We had come now to a bend, a crooked elbow, where the bank of the river juts out and were within sight of a charming pavilion, all white, built in the form of a Koûba, set high up in a corner. Its sugar cone top was half hidden by the waving, caressing plumes of the palm trees which spread their shade over a little green balcony: an ideal refuge for poets and dreamers.

Seated there, reading, was an imposing familiar figure in a long coat of fine brown cloth, the embroidered vest and cuffs with their close rows of buttons shewing through a sleeveless *gandoura* of silk — both garments the shade of the ripening dates which encircled and crowned the stems of the palm trees. His full Turkish trousers were thrust into high riding boots and he wore the M'Zabite turban kept in place by folds of gold coloured silk. He rose when he saw us and at once hastened out of his garden to suggest tea — à l'Arabe — an offer we gladly accepted, tired and thirsty after our ride.

We followed him up a side path by a wall of loose stones, piled one on top of another, to a high door, which stood open, framing a vista of green grass plots and prickly pears grouped closely in masses, their pale green flat leaves growing off one another. To the right were wide shallow steps leading up a bank under a framework of twigs, bare now, but in the early tropical summer covered with leaves and hung with clusters of grapes green and purple.

This vinery led to the *koûba;*[7] a deliciously cool little chamber with walls all white from top to centre, then lined to their base with green tiles. A stone *dokana* covered by a large straw mat, filled up a third of the space; and a niche, with a blessing inscribed over it, was cut into the wall to hold books by the poets of Araby.

We sat chatting about the foreigners who, rarely enough, yet occasionally, spend a few months in this place for their health, their art, or their happiness: a rather sore subject at present, for one has just gone away, loudly denouncing the Arabs as "all thieves and liars." Then, to make matters worse, a lady from "t'other side the Atlantic," with an insatiable thirst for knowledge and not much discretion, has lately called on his wife, and promptly enquired "how many he had?" "Surely not content with one only!"

There is nothing an Arab resents more strongly than this impertinent curiosity. To strangers, he refrains, if possible, from giving his name; mentioning

[7] A little summer house built like a saint's mausoleum.

his business; or his object in taking a journey. Any discussion of his home life is intolerable to him: even amongst his intimates its privacy is held well nigh sacred. If he be poor, his dwelling, for choice, will be hidden like those we came upon earlier in the day on the hillside: if he be rich, he sets it within some walled garden, away from sight or sound of the world of mankind; or surrounded by a stone enclosure, with apertures for air, but no windows. His wife is never mentioned. To speak of her; enquire directly for her, or her health, is an unpardonable social sin; but the language is amply furnished with suitably vague expressions to meet the occasion if need be. "How is everyone at home?" "Are you all well?" "Anyone ill at your house?" would all be safe questions and quite in good taste. To say baldly to an Arab "Who is your mother?" would simply make him gasp; but if the enquiry were altered to "Who are your maternal uncles?" he would comprehend and reply to it!!

Fortunately the arrival of tea, carried in on a brass tray by one of the gardeners, turned the talk into other and happier channels. It looked so refreshing as our host poured it out of a slender necked cafetière into stemmed cups of blue fluted glass: served cold, this sunshiny afternoon, of course without milk or sugar, but pervaded by the faint flavour and scent of the fragrant herbs with which it is mixed.

We sat in a row on the *dokana;* Lisette and I drinking endless cups of tea and all discussing forth-

coming events, for great changes are pending at the close of the year. In this peaceful community of peasant shepherds and gardeners, where strife and sedition are not, there is no longer need for a high handed rule, a Commandant, officers, soldiers: "All are going, Thank God!" says the Arab under his breath! A civil administration, with a right of appeal, will replace the military jurisdiction: but we, who are onlookers merely, will miss, in this radiant light, the gleam of scarlet and gold; the blue, red and yellow of the French tirailleur; the swarthy Zouave in his braided jacket and full pantaloons; and mostly, of course, the picturesque Spahis and the mounted Cavaliers du Bureau Arabe. From my window, times out of number, I have watched them ride by: singly, in pairs, sometimes a gay company. A Spahi in *burnous* of brick red, his white *haïk* confined by coils of deepest brown camel's hair: the Cavaliers their great cloaks of grey blue, with a thin line and facing of yellow or strawberry pink, drawn up at the sides revealing big rose coloured riding boots. They and their chargers are one as they lean back in their high Arab saddles of dark crimson or golden brown leather, where they sleep during the toilsome night marches over the sands of the desert; their animals trained to a pace between a walk and a trot, which makes least demand on the horse and its rider.

My mind was full of these pictures as the others talked on of the happier days that are coming, whilst the shade of the palm trees lengthened and

wafted along by the breeze from the river came smoke from the town of innumerable fires lit up at evening.

We all left the little Pavilion and strolled once more through the garden to the bank, where our host, priding himself on being very chic and Parisian, kissed our hands as we parted. This is, of course, a great innovation in customs reserved only for *roumya:* [8] but with an Arab, salutations, of which there are many varieties, are almost invariably a matter of elaborate courtesy. *Salamoune âleïkoume!* says one strictly orthodox follower of Islam to another "Peace be unto you!"—"And with you Peace," *Oua Aleïkoume Esselema* is the response as hands touch and each carries his own to his lips, the while graciously bending his head. In the street I have sometimes seen a young man, as he passed a *mou 'abbir,*[9] with a reverential gesture that is very picturesque and charming, literally kiss the hem of his garment: or two friends closely embrace, putting their hands on each other's shoulders.

If two strangers meet in a lonely place, it is the least proud who takes the initiative, saying: "Peace be with you!" Should he chance to be a sectarian, a Jew, or a Christian, the curt rejoinder "To you!" will not be a surprise: but to be entirely ignored will put him on his guard, for, obviously, the other traveller is ill-disposed towards him.

"Bonjoûr Modom!" often greets my ears,

[8] Strangers: Christians.

[9] A man much respected, leading a holy life.

Kindly lent by Mrs. Mathews

The River

kindly spoken by the men who cross my path during my solitary walks abroad. The women nod and smile and stop to look at my clothes with as much curiosity as I take note of theirs and of their strange clumsy brooches and barbaric ear-rings; of their chained pendants hanging on either side their faces over their plaits of hair from headdress to shoulder.

The formula for good-bye is either *Rouh 'bel áfia* or *Emshi besselema,* spoken by the host to his guest, and as the latter crosses the threshold he responds by way of farewell, *Ábka ála kheir.*

CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT FEASTS

"And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold behind him *a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son."* GENESIS XXII, 13.

"And the ark rested . . . upon the mountains of Ararat." GENESIS VIII, 4.

"Nothing, nothing can preserve from death: neither an amulet fastened to the head, nor a fragment of green pottery suspended round the neck."
ARAB SAYING.

November 19th, 1912.

IN the more fitful sunlight and tenderer radiance of a winter sky, all the little girl grubs, able to beg enough pennies during the past week, have been suddenly transformed into brilliant butterflies. Excepting a woman's head-dress, to which they are promoted at marriage, and not then if still very young, the clothing of the tiny mites is only a smaller edition of their mothers'; generally with allowance for growth, so that hems sweep the ground with an amusing suggestiveness of "dressing up."

Of course girl babies are very unwelcome when

they arrive in this world, but at least they are no longer buried alive, or abandoned to die in the desert, as was the case in pre-Islamic times, before Zaïd, son of Amr, forerunner of the Prophet, went preaching through Arab villages that the murder of children is a sin. Was it the spirit of Laylah, his grandmother, which spoke within him? She, says tradition, barely escaped the doom pronounced by an irate father, disappointed that a son had not been born to him. "Kill the child!" he had flung angrily at the unhappy mother, who, fearing to question a decision she was too maternal to obey, dared evade it by giving her baby into the care of a faithful slave to hide for her. That very night her lord dreamed he heard voices which prophesied, saying:—"Thy daughter shall be the mother of great men: so it is written!" Awakening in a state of agitation, he demanded, "Where is my daughter?"—"I have killed her in compliance with your wish," was the meek reply. "Impossible! She cannot be dead: see to it that she is carefully tended that her destiny may be fulfilled." "Well! well!" said the mother, taking heart of grace, "perhaps after all she is alive!" After Zaïd came the Prophet with his admonition: "Thou shalt not kill thy children!" and his rebuke to a neglectful father who boasted that though he had many little girls, he had never caressed one of them. "Unhappy wretch!" cried Mahomet, "God must have crushed all kindness out of your heart: you do not know the sweetest joy ever experienced by man!"

Playthings therefore for the time, all too short, of their childhood, learning nothing, whilst their little Jewish neighbours go daily to school, they are dreadfully spoiled and undisciplined. It can only be the fittest physically who survive, clad as they are in their muslin rags, whatever the weather; whilst their more valued brothers, each and all, are cosily enshrouded in a stout *burnous* which is as a very shell to the little snail inside. Lisette's models — of naughtiness — give her infinite trouble: they wriggle and squirm, demand pennies and sweets, and, if reproved, yell with might and main, or make a wild dash for the door. Cheery, bright little creatures withal, laughing and jesting as they pose, whilst Fâtimah, the eldest and centre of the group, tells stories: or divines, drawing mystic circles on the sanded floor, and tossing the yellow grains in her palm, to see how they fall for good or ill luck of each. To-day and all the past week Lisette's Arab house knows them not, and Lisette herself is taking an enforced holiday. They have joined the swarm which is flitting about the town, very gorgeous in bran new *mendilat,*[1] and frocks of purple and green; or red and rose; or perhaps scarlet patterned with yellow and headgear of black striped with a border of many bright tints. Every hue of the rainbow has been requisitioned, lightly softened by transparencies of figured white muslin floating from brown neck to browner heel, shaped like the cope of a Catholic priest and brooched under the chin with a large gold

[1] Coloured scarves for the head.

ornament set with a stone. Hair gleams glossy and black on either side each childish face: plaits doubled under covering the ears, then lost in the folds of *mendilat:* even rouge, saffron tinted, sweet smelling, has not been forgotten! From the vantage ground of my balcony I can watch them run hither and thither all over the Square begging for pence from the male passerby and the well-to-do Arab, like his prototype of the West, is rarely proof against the allurements of these miniature women, so gaily apparelled.

There came along presently one, already made bankrupt, showing his silver sewn purse of gazelle skin, inside and out, shaking its emptiness at them, as Sadïya and Hafsâ and Zarkâ clung to his *burnous* with pleading, lustrous, *koh'eul* rimmed eyes, tiny *henneh* stained hands outstretched for *souarda.*[2]

Though sorely tempted to throw down consolation, I dared not, well knowing that never, *never* should I regain my present peace and immunity, won by sour looks, forbidding airs and obdurate pleas of poverty. Later, however, during my afternoon stroll on the outskirts, I encountered a couple of bright little creatures flitting towards me, and for long, till my store of pennies and ha'pence was completely exhausted, I amused myself rolling coins down that silent deserted side street for the pleasure of seeing them chased with a rush, a sudden flutter of wings white and scarlet and a breathless excitement.

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[2] Sous.

Next day.

The Fort guns thundered a salute this morning early to usher in Aïd-el-Kebîr, one of the three Great Festivals recognised by the orthodox. It seems so especially à propos in this little community largely composed of shepherds, to commemorate Abraham's sacrifice of the ram instead of his son, whom the Arabs like to call Ishmael, their progenitor, instead of Isaac as we have the story. Ancient rites there are, still followed in a somewhat half blind fashion. Poor and woe begone indeed is he who cannot, on this one occasion at least, appear before his little world in spotless raiment, purified for the sacrifice of blood which to-day will bring the followers of Islam into close relationship with the Great Spirit of the Universe.

Many sheep, poor bleating victims, have been "consecrated to God" in accordance with the usual custom: bought by the rich and shared with their poorer neighbours. In every home the meal is timed to take place as soon as possible after the sacrifice: the liver, which is believed to contain more of the divine essence than any other portion, is eaten first and a shoulder blade kept and hung up for luck, and for divination.

It may be said that the slaughter of any animal for food is a matter of ritual with the Arab as, turning towards Mecca, he pronounces the *bism îllah* [3] before cutting its throat. He thus daily renews the link between himself and the Creator by the restora-

[3] To ask a blessing.

tion of his own physical powers and by liberating all the vital force, the *baraka,* contained in the breath and warm blood of the creature. In the case of a hen it should be swung seven times round the head and made to touch the back and chest to further ensure the transmission of the divine essence into his own person. Here, however, so debased has the rite become, so entirely lost is its esoteric meaning that, by a far more practical and mundane association of ideas, the victim is swung seven times over the embers of the fire where presently it will be cooked. When engaged in painting Nakhla's portrait one day, Lisette actually witnessed this extraordinary operation carried out on a wretched fowl, intended for the evening meal, and already half dead from fright and rough handling. No amount of questions could elicit any reason for the needless cruelty, save that it was "for luck"; but in any case whatever virtues the Arab possesses, that of compassion cannot be counted as one of them.

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December 18th, 1912.

Within a month of *Aïd-el-Kebîr,* another festival is upon us, heralded the last few days not by gay and brilliant butterflies, but by a nightly plague of snails and caterpillars whose turn it is to search, when school is over, for copper coins. It seems fitting enough that it should be so, for *Achoûrâ* is a survival of an ancient agrarian rite to welcome the god of spring, who is putting life into the seeds of the earth that they may germinate and, in due time, bring

forth their fruits for the nourishment of all these little brown creatures, who ask for pennies wherewith to celebrate his nativity.

The year is dead! Hail to the New Year! The orthodox believer will deny this and tell you he is commemorating Adam's birthday, or his repentance: or, more often, the safety of Noah when the waters had subsided: but in reality, there is another and deeper reason than all, or any one of these, which had so strong a hold on the people that Mahomet when he came, wise man, only sought to engraft upon it some idea in accordance with his own more evolved and crystallised system.

It is recommended (not enjoined) to the believer that he should fast at Achoûrâ, at least so I am told, but whatever may happen elsewhere, in the Place of Happiness he does no such thing. So much bleating has there been, and such numbers of sheep, the last few days, in the market place, that, on the contrary, I think we all feast. Not to would surely be an unwise plan, for the whole of the ensuing twelve months will be governed by the actions of this day.

"Please God," says the Arab devoutly, "I will keep Achoûrâ next year as I am keeping it this!" and he bathes, that he may be immune from illness: being vain, puts *koh'eul* under his eyes: stains his hands with *hennah* like the women, declaring himself purified thereby, though the orthodox look askant at such practices and approve them not.

Some of the women also bring down condemnation on their heads by visiting the tombs of their

dead at Achoûrâ; and it certainly seems a pity they should elect to sadden a day of otherwise universal rejoicing by tears which can be shed, without comment, any Friday during the year when their lords are at prayer. Every week, on the Mussulman Sabbath, at mid day, the roads leading to the cemeteries on the outskirts beyond the river are alive with vivid patches of colour: moving in masses at first, then dividing up as each woman seeks a mound, known to her by an amulet she has placed there; or a few shells threaded together and slung round the triangular headstone, marking some nameless grave where parent, or husband, or child has been laid to rest facing towards the sacred city of pilgrimage and prayer.

"Many, many Arabs die," Abdallah has told me, sadly shaking his head, "because they are not properly cared for"; and at the approach to the town, more graveyards bear witness to the truth of this testimony. In the midst of one, at the base of the hill, is a saint's mausoleum. Its walls are decorated with Arabic lettering written around in the form of a wheel; and its square roof has an upright projecting cornice, out of which rises a sugar loaf top, which first greets the eye of the stranger on his arrival.

Further up the slope, the M'Zabite, from whom other Mussulmen hold entirely aloof, buries his dead. He is unorthodox: a trader and shopkeeper: the "Jew of the Desert"; whom the more distinguished followers of the Prophet estimate as "only one-fifth of a person"; but he thrives by his industry and the mounds beneath which lie his kinsmen are covered

by slabs, or have even more elaborate tombstones.

It is curious to note the common flints which have been carefully laid on some of the graves: sometimes as many as seven: not in regular order, but singly, and probably each at a different time, or by a different person, as an act of homage and veneration to the dead.

Was it this idea also which prompted the gift of a small stoneware jug, green and yellow, firmly cemented on one of the principal headstones; or was it placed there for luck? Did the donor of this ornament — so strange to our eyes, so seemingly childish and futile — hope that the green pottery would stand the loved one in good stead when rendering an account of his past life to the two angels who visit the tombs? Everything perishes with a Mussulman at his death, save the virtuous child he has begotten to praise Allah; the alms he has bestowed on the poor: the services he has rendered to his fellow men. All these are duly credited to his earthly account; and on the other side is written the list, long or short as may be, of his sins, negligences and ignorances: all matters wherein he may have offended.

The two angels, who have questioned him as to his faith and his works, sum up; and if the balance be on the wrong side, he is carried off on their wings to the bridge, which is but of an hair's breadth and sharp as the edge of a razor: where no wicked man can stand, nor can he ever pass over, so he falls headlong into the yawning abyss beneath him: into the eternal fires of Hell.

If, however, our dead Mussulman has led a godly, virtuous life, he spans the *sirath* in an instant of time: and to ease the bitterness of death eats of the liver of the Sacred Bull, on whose horns rests this little world of ours. Then, robed in green silk; fed on choicest viands and quaffing *rhiqi*[4] and *mekhtoume*,[4] he dwells forever with houris in a Paradise evolved from the imaginations of a people as yet unable to attain to a higher ideal of a future life.

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Well then as orthodoxy has decided that the 18th of December is *not* New Year's Day, we look forward — of whatever creed we may be — to another cordial exchange of greetings and good wishes in the early days of January according to the dictates, more or less, of the Julian Calendar which the Arabs use for all practical purposes.

Instead, however, of again putting on their beautiful new clothes and fine linen in honour of the third great Festival; the men, for the first few days of Ennaïr, will observe the rites of mourning: will don their oldest and shabbiest: abstain from changing their garments, from bathing, from cutting their hair, or their nails.

Inasmuch as Achoûrâ has been the occasion for the renewal and rehabilitation, so to speak, of the man: at Ennaïr, it is the home that must be cleaned, swept and newly garnished. Outside the tents on the hillside near the brick kilns, the upstanding boughs and branches planted there to give shelter from rain,

[4] Exquisite wines.

wind and prying eyes, will be replaced with fresh ones full of young sap, of the vigorous forces of all the vegetation upspringing since the birth of the new god and capable of transmission to man and beast.

Ennaïr is, as a matter of fact, the annual "spring clean" of the housewife, and whatever betides is an augury for the luck of her home for twelve months to come. It behoves her, therefore, to wash all the clothes: throw away everything that is worn out, even to the beams from which her utensils have been suspended: to send her children to find three new stones for the hearth: to make a holocaust of her cooking pots and pans, her mortar, her wooden dishes and platter and replace them with new ones. *Couscouss* cooked by steam is forbidden on the first day of Ennaïr, so even if she cannot afford to dispense with her old *keskâs,* it must at least lie idle and unused for twenty-four hours; and her unfinished *burnous* come off its frame and be carried to the other side of the mountain and back, before she can venture to start work on it again.

A most exhausting day this, of practical and seemingly unpractical necessities for the Arab woman, and more than that: of many, many things to remember and observations to make of prognostics for a year's good luck or ill. She must hearken to the cries of the mules and donkeys: what do they portend for the future? "When the ass brays, seek refuge in God from the artifices of Satan, who may be stoned," says a well-known proverb, recalling that memorable occasion when Abraham was thus

able to repulse the Evil One as he endeavoured to hinder the proposed sacrifice of his son, Ishmael, to God.

The flight of the birds must be watched, especially the crows and the bats, birds of ill augur; and, she must take note, as good wife and mother, if the beans swell properly in the water when the *cher-chem* [5] is cooking and thereby relieve her anxieties lest her household lack food during the coming twelve months. For her neighbours' sake, too, as well as her own and that of her kin, she will place on the house top at evening a small bowl of meal, or one of salt, and a fleece of white wool that, in the night the dew may work its will on them and *"In-shallah!"* [6] leave hopeful signs, when morning dawns, of growing rains in the winter and spring that will bring forth a plentiful harvest.

A busy day indeed; and for the witch doctor some strenuous hours to follow, for every spell that she weaves under the moon; every remedy she distils with her simples and herbs by the light of the stars; every powder she burns with her weird incantations; every formula she mutters and mumbles is rendered infallible by the magic enchantment of the first night of Ennaïr.

[5] Dish of beans.
[6] Please God.

CHAPTER V

A "NUMÉRO"

"A Mussulman marriage is one of purchase: the husband must pay for his bride. A wedding can no more take place without a sum of money changing hands than can any other sale." PERRON.

November, 1912.

AFTER an immense show of coyness; much hesitation and postponement from day to day; all sorts of excuses, difficult to combat on account of their vagueness; Nakhla has at length yielded to Lisette's solicitations to paint her portrait. Not, however, in the "studio," that would be asking too much: it is only in the sanctuary of her mother's hut that she can consent to pose, for at this particular juncture she must be circumspect in her comings and goings. Nakhla, aged fifteen, has divorced her first husband and is most desirous to pick another packet out of the matrimonial dip.

Five years ago, when the village beauty was a little girl of ten and there was not enough bread in the home to fill all the hungry mouths, the wife of the French doctor offered to take the pretty child as maid; for servants hardly exist at all in the Place of Happiness and Nakhla was both handy and attractive.

Nakhla

When the doctor was moved on elsewhere, the little Arab girl went to Lisette for a time; learned many more things in life and, amongst others, to speak French. Moreover she developed character and a personality, so that one of the artists here went so far as to speak of her as a " numéro "; that is to say, a person to be reckoned with. Naturally, being intelligent and quick, existence took on another aspect for the child in her wholly different surroundings, which, from a purely ideal point of view makes, no doubt, for spiritual progress; but, as we all know, with such new graft, life must immediately become more complicated and difficult.

It was not surprising, therefore, that when Aly-ben-Sayïa bought Nakhla last year for 130 francs (including the marriage fee of six francs) and took her, as wife, to live with his mother and pretty sister Hafsâ, there was trouble from the very outset in this joint ménage, and the bride was not as amenable as other Arab wives, who have the reputation of making no undue fuss about arrangements which do not please them. Aly, moreover, is a worthless scamp: vain, like all Arabs, and vain to excess; idle too, living as best he may on his mother's portion of old Mohamed-ben-Sayïa's lessened fortune, which must be shared with the other widow and her young son, Abdallah, who have always enjoyed a home of their own in another quarter of the town.

Within a year of the marriage, Nakhla took her husband before the Caïd, stated her grounds of complaint and repaying some portion of the purchase

money, she divorced Aly with every evidence of contempt, and went back to live with her mother.

This was the position of affairs when we arrived in September; and already it was evident that the additional strain on the funds of the poor little home was rather more than it could bear, and that, allowing for the three months which must elapse before she could remarry, Nakhla must make all haste to try and find another husband; one, also with money enough to pay the debt of sixty francs still due to Aly.

But for her extreme poverty, I doubt if she would have been cajoled into sitting for Lisette, for what possible husband would wish his wife's portrait to be in the hands of a stranger, albeit a woman, or perhaps sold for money? A truly odious idea indeed and the artist and his craft are always eyed with suspicion and dislike.

The painting of the portrait, therefore, progresses slowly and is hedged about with many precautions and much secrecy. Abdurahman carries Lisette's easel and brushes to and fro under cover of darkness, though I should imagine his being accessory to the facts is in itself a sufficient guarantee for the whole town to be informed of the proceedings. However, outwardly at least, the conventions are being observed and that is more than half the battle in other places besides this.

Amongst prospective suitors there is a certain cousin, who, by virtue of his relationship, visits at

the house, and I have met him there more than once and though, with my imperfect knowledge of Arabs, I can hardly sit in judgment on him, it has occurred to me that he would be a doubtful prize. However, Nakhla has a large piece of lead which she puts into a pot of boiling water regularly every morning (except Fridays)[1] to see what form it will take and for some time the daily forecast has been propitious for this particular young man. Negotiations are still pending, but a recent wedding has changed the complexion of affairs and, incidentally, the contortions of the molten lead which assist its owner to arrive at her decisions.

Lisette and I were invited to the ceremonies of last Wednesday and wended our way to the bride's home early one afternoon to find every alley, passage and path leading up to it, choked with dirty humanity and the abode itself filled to suffocation. In the first apartment we saw a melancholy-looking girl seated on cloths with her back to the wall, supported on either side by a sister and hemmed in by a semicircle of intimates who were squatting around her. To look miserable, however, is merely a matter of good form and there is no need to jump to the conclusion that the bride was genuinely unhappy. Her mother, who received in the adjoining apartment, was very smiling indeed and we heard that a large sum had been paid for the uninteresting little person we had just seen. It was only next day, however,

[1] The Mussulman Sunday.

that we fully realised the wealth of the bridegroom as exhibited at the public festivities to which he treated the town.

Guided by the beating of the tomtoms we arrived at the large triangular space which we had learned to know and admire by moonlight. Now it was bathed in a golden glow and crowded: but near its apex a slight elevation of mud banked up against the houses enabled us to look over the heads of the other spectators. The *fantasia*[2] was in full swing and the principal flute player was seated, that his head might be decorated with bank notes folded lengthwise; and large five franc pieces were ranged round his turban, kept in place by a deep fold of the linen and camel's hair cords. Facing us, at right angles, was a café where the men guests sat drinking and, beneath a red awning, a brilliant, many hued rainbow of women awaited the dance. Shrouded figures, between whom and themselves a great gulf had been fixed: a long line of forms enveloped in dingy, uncertain white tones relieved by one deep note of purple, looked down from the opposite roofs with aristocratic aloofness.

The master of ceremonies chose out three of the dancers, who surrounded the musician and transferred all the money and notes from his head to their own, so that at first I thought this was a novel way of remunerating them for their services. However, it only needed five minutes to undeceive me, for after they returned to their places the sum was carefully

[2] Fête.

collected, counted, added to, and the whole proceedings repeated, again and again, till not one of us could possibly have any doubt that this Arab bridegroom was a multi-millionaire!

Then the musicians changed their tune for the dancing girls and to my surprise, from the outer edge of the rainbow, I saw Nakhla advance towards the cleared space in the centre. Certain ominous prophecies that had been made regarding her flashed into my mind. Still, unlike the rest, she was veiled with a green transparency, spangled with silver, so we must hope that, even if she be skating on thin ice, the conventions have again been sufficiently observed.

She looked very handsome in purple, with a brave show of jewels — all borrowed — and the touches of rose red about her waist, combined with the apple green of her *louga,* are the colours said to awaken desire. Be that as it may, I noticed a sergeant of Zouaves lean forward to watch her and deliberately point her out to a comrade seated beside him. This Aly saw also, present of course with the rest of the world, and obviously wrathful and disturbed; but he has lost his rights and it is rumoured, moreover, that he too is in search of another spouse.

As might be expected, the painting of the portrait has been quite in abeyance and though Lisette has resumed her labours again, Nakhla is a less satisfactory model than ever. Her thoughts are engrossed by the sergeant, who is stationed at Algiers and is making overtures to take her back with him. An atmosphere of suppressed excitement prevails in the

little hut: friends constantly arrive and one old man, to bring luck to the wooing, made the expectant bride take off her *mendil* and spat on her head. This is one of the most usual methods of transmitting the sacred force from one individual to another and it has been said of a certain *chérif* [3] that, when on a tour of inspection a child was taken up to him, he would spit into its mouth, saying: *" Teqra, in châh Allâh,"* that is: " You will become learned, please God! "

As Lisette's *habibka,*[4] I also am permitted to pay a visit now and again and in the afternoon am regaled with tea and scone, like a big muffin (only infinitely nicer and more digestible) baked over the embers. Afterwards, seated on Nakhla's *soudoûk,*[5] I watch the women weaving the *burnous;* or a couple of boy cousins playing at draughts; or, I take a hand myself at cards. This is amusing and the pack, of Spanish origin, is primitive and quaint. The great object of our favourite game consists in pairing the cards by their numbers. Four cards are dealt face upwards in the centre and three to each player who, in turn, tries to match one in his hand with any of those on the board and make a trick; for, whoever has most cards when the pack is exhausted is the winner.

For variety, we play another game, still simpler and more dependent, if possible, upon luck. Three cards are dealt to each player and, should fortune

[3] Nobleman.
[4] Friend.
[5] Coffer.

favour him with one or two more which together make up the number seven, he wins. The next winning number is eight, then nine, or even a pair of the first cards of any suit, plus two.

Being under the happy impression that I had grasped these details very quickly, it was humiliating to be told that there is yet another game called *besqa,* which is much too difficult for me to learn. True, I have sometimes forgotten to deal round to my right, and also, to take the cards from the bottom of the pack upwards, after the custom of so many years which has made contrariwise practically automatic. This they may consider sufficient evidence of a feeble intelligence, for nothing will shake the cousins' resolution not even to attempt to teach me: and I secretly begin to wonder (and thereby my hurt vanity is soothed) if they know how to play it themselves! So I have ceased to press the point, especially as Nakhla is getting irritable and nervy, and this morning she burst into tears. Lisette is relieved that her handsome, if somewhat coarse features, are transferred now to the canvas and, so striking is the likeness of the wilful and imperious beauty that the children are all perfectly crazy to kiss the picture and have been allowed to do so, one after another, in a little procession.

The purple *mendil* which covers her head accentuates her rich colouring and enhances the dark brilliance of her beautiful eyes. There is no trace of the unhappiness, of the distress and agitation the poor model now exhibits, for the sergeant seems to

be withdrawing his pretensions: has, as a matter of fact, already returned to Algiers, alarmed at the large debt still owing to Aly, which must be paid before Nakhla can be free.

The molten lead is failing to do its duty by way of hopeful prophecy in the mornings and now the cards are being requisitioned to see what the future holds in store. For this purpose Nakhla and I have an appointment with a witch wife; my companion requesting also some love charms and I, ostensibly, in search of amulets to give me back the health and strength which has already been restored to me by the magic of the sun and the sand.

CHAPTER VI

THE SORCERESS

"She is here, as everywhere, the sibyl, the sorceress, the soothsayer." PERRON.

"What is not written, is unobtainable. From what is written, none can escape."

ARAB CHANT.

November 30th, 1912.

IT was nearly six o'clock on a dark evening when, calling out *"Roumya,"* [1] I knocked at Nakhla's squalid home and found her anxiously awaiting me, so rolled up in her *melh'afa* that only half one eye was visible.

Together we groped our way along a little lane to a high palm tree door, which looked so solid and so weighty that I doubt if our joint efforts could have pushed it back. Fortunately it stood sufficiently ajar, giving access to a narrow passage beyond, at the extreme end of which lived the soothsayer, her tiny hut blocking it up and thus forming a cul-de-sac.

By an obliging stretch of imagination this enclosed space was divided into two compartments and the further one was sufficiently roofed in and

[1] Stranger: Christian.

screened to ensure our privacy when we had locked the door, after hustling some children off the premises, whose curiosity had overcome their terror of the demons let loose on the earth after sunset.

Some glowing embers on the hearth and a tiny oil lamp threw an uncertain light on the mud walls; on the rough poles which supported the roof; and on the crouching figure of an old woman clad in deep red and purple, holding in one hand an ancient brass jar, used as a mortar.

When she rose, she was taller than most Berber women and her height was accentuated by all the wool she had used to raise her square head-dress covered with its white and purple drapery. It surmounted an old and wrinkled visage and a kindly one: though the jaws were toothless, the eyes were bright and full of life and intelligence. Habiba enjoys quite a vogue amongst her neighbours as a medicine woman and is at present attending Abdurahman's little brother, whose wrist has been injured and who is too young — the elder boy says with decision — to be treated by the French doctor. There is evidently no doubt in his mind as to whose skill is superior and the Médécin Major's diplomas count for little when weighed in the balance against traditions which have been handed down from a remote past.

Our reception was a very gracious one, for Nakhla is a favourite and I, introduced as a witch from the West deeply versed in magic lore, was accorded the welcome usually extended to a member

of the same confraternity, just arrived from a foreign land. My somewhat fraudulent reputation has been built up for me gradually in the town, on the strength of the many leading questions I have asked, in my efforts to elicit accurate information as to certain customs and especially in regard to religion and magic. Also it is partly based on the very amateur knowledge of palmistry, which enables me to gain some insight into the lives and minds of the women. It should be added that the words " stranger " and " strange," near akin in our own language, in Arabic are both expressed by *gherîb;* and Christians are often supposed to possess unusual gifts owing to an association of ideas with the raising of the dead by Sidi Aïsa (Jesus) : an account of the means used being frequently given in books on magic. There is a rumour abroad that, when I have increased my skill amongst the Arabs, I propose to open an atelier in Paris, and Habiba had already sent me a message that she was quite agreeable to a mutual exchange of spells and witchcraft generally!

Though unable to meet her by the acceptance of this noble offer, I could at least give her pleasure by reading her hand and promised her a long life, which delighted her and she referred to this especially from time to time during our long interview. Why she should so desire to lengthen her term of days was difficult to understand, for she was childless and quite alone; had buried two husbands who had been kind to her; and eked out but a scanty subsistence by weaving the *burnous,* bonesetting and by

her spells and talismans. Still, there were happy memories to fill the lonely days and a firm belief in her own curative and occult powers — for she took herself very seriously — so that her life was fuller and her lot immeasurably superior to that of most Arab women in their declining years.

Divination from the lines of the palm was a surprising novelty and, as far as I have been able to ascertain, cheiromancy, as practised in India and in Europe, is unknown in North Africa, though involuntary movements of the hands and body have their meaning: footprints convey strange information to a trained observer: and physiognomy, of which traces still linger, was once considered an exact science by Mussulmen, and resorted to in their courts of law to settle questions of paternity. In addition, every other medium, employed by soothsayers the world over, seems in constant use to lift a corner of the veil which hides the future.

It can be well understood that to a race, whose language is built up of imagery and whose existence is primitive and very near to Nature in her most beatific mood, the murmurs of the conch shell and the flights of birds and arrows might easily suggest mental pictures and processes inconceivable by a dweller in towns. What wonder is it too that they, whose dominion of desire and little lives are rounded by a profound fatalism, born of their great solitudes, should seek for signs by the way to guide them in the fulfilment of their unalterable destiny? They gaze into the crystal and the magic mirror to see

with awe the soul projected from the body; hang round their necks verses of the Koran enclosed in leather to protect them from evil; and ask the aid of the more intuitive to read their dreams for them, or divine future events from cards, tea or coffee grounds, or from grains of sugar or of sand.

Our witch now turned her attention to my supposed ills and her brass mortar and pestle came into play by the firelight, as well as the contents of many little paper packets produced out of a red rag in which they had been carefully tied up. As an initiate in these mysteries I suggested the names of certain aromatic plants — myrrh, coriander, caraway — which I knew to be necessary for spells: also some little flakes of gelatine, or flour did not surprise me: but the packet of machine needles was so unexpected that it quite took my breath away and I forgot to enquire if they sew up the pains or help to dig them out!

The old crone handed me a piece of broken crockery with an injunction to spit into it seven times. It was then placed at the bottom of the mortar with the aromatic powders, ground up, turned out and manipulated into a cake with the fingers and to the accompaniment of a murmured incantation. Eight needles were selected and placed on top: four one way, and four another. Finally, a semi-circle of seven flakes of gelatine put the finishing touch to my talisman which was waved seven times, with great solemnity, round my head.

The little cake has since been enclosed in a rudi-

mentary piece of tin folded over at both ends, but as a dirty trickle seems to exude continually from the corners, I am, unfortunately, prevented from wearing it in my hat, or tying it round my neck!

All this time Nakhla, crouched in the monkey like attitude, which only the voluminous draperies of Arab women render possible, was patiently awaiting her turn, looking very pensive and sad, for there have been fresh developments within the last few days and those not happy ones.

We changed places and a very dirty pack of playing cards was produced and waved seven times round the girl's head, during which operation she bent her thoughts on the absent sergeant of Zouaves. The number seven, it should be said, is of the highest importance in magic, for God has made seven countries, seven seas, seven doors and circles in hell, seven members of the body — in short the examples of the rôle it plays in the creation of the universe are too numerous to mention.

The cards were shuffled, cut and dealt into four packs, one of which Nakhla selected and the witch proceeded to read each card separately as she drew it from the bottom of the pack.

"You have a lover," she said, holding up a king with a sceptre. "He is a fine soldier" (another king with a sword). "What happiness he brought you" (roots and flowers), "for he loves you as his eyes" (more roots and flowers). "*Ah, ya,* like that, for God, he loves you. He has eaten in your presence" (two stems with branches) "and both

thought good fortune would be yours" (a long stem with many twigs). "Alas! tears followed" (seven roots). "He is a poor man. He has said adieu and taken his possessions" (seven lozenges) "and has gone away a long distance" (three long knives). "He too weeps all day" (five little knives and flowers).

Nakhla, the tears streaming down her woe-begone visage, confirmed the truth of the narrative by sundry exclamations and nods of the head at intervals.

Discarding the packet in her hand the witch selected another, and by means of it, took up her parable again: —

"You have some enemies, bad people" (seven knives) "who dwell near you" (two long knives). "They will sit at your own hearth" (two lozenges) "for you will go back to the man you took before the Caïd" (four disks and the sun in the centre). "He has been in prison" (five roots) "for stealing some money" (seven disks) "when he was employed by Government" (knave on horseback). "He will give you a little present" (three large disks) "and you take to his house" (large lozenge) "all your possessions" (five lozenges).

I looked at Nakhla, dismayed. Was she really going back to Aly, who, I now remembered, had once been in jail for misappropriating money belonging to the Infirmary where he was employed in some subordinate capacity.

"Yes, it was true!" the poor girl said between

sobs. Aly could not get anyone else to marry him and had offered her fifteen francs to go back again as his wife. Her mother could not keep her, nor pay the debt of sixty francs. Lisette, it seemed, had given her a padlock for her *soudouk,* so that her few treasures might be safe from prying eyes and fingers. It was all settled then! Nothing to be done! Besides . . . it was written.

Feeling myself quite helpless in the face of this village tragedy, I turned instinctively to the witch, who proved herself a woman of resource, being no doubt well accustomed to deal with similar crises in the lives of her neighbours. She suggested that what could not be mended, might be modified; but the situation was a bad one for Nakhla and a remedy could only be sought in the domain of black magic, from the cult of the dead.

About a year previously there had died, after a painful lingering illness, a young consumptive, and on the day subsequent to his interment, it was rumoured that his grave had been opened and the body moved and tampered with. Not too much was said about the matter, but it was a theory, generally accepted by everyone, that this was the work of the sorcerers, who wanted some fragments — perhaps of the bones — of the dead youth for their magic rites. A body so diseased could be contagious to a living person, but it is also believed that the abject helplessness of the corpse may be transmitted and that food stirred by its hands acquires strange occult powers.

Such food it was Habiba now produced, rolled into tiny pellets called *berkoûks,* five of which she counted out carefully, placed them one by one into a white metal tube and gave to Nakhla. As that dead body, whose cold stiff fingers had touched the pillules, could neither see, nor hear, nor speak, so would it be with Aly when his wife desired it. As that corpse had been powerless against the sorcerers, so also would he be submissive to her will.

Glancing sideways at Nakhla's jaw, which seemed suddenly to have hardened and developed — so strong is the force of suggestion — I thought that, after all, perhaps it would not need *berkoûks* to conquer Aly.

CHAPTER VII

EL HAMEL: THE "LOST TOWN"

"Nulle science positive . . . c'est le désert. Aujourd'hui le silence et l'inertie des solitudes, et, avec cela, la persuasion que l'islamisme est le dernier mot de Dieu sur la vie de l'humanité, entretiennent les Arabes dans une apathie extraordinaire, mais logique." PERRON.

December 25th, 1912.

CHRISTMAS Day and such exquisite weather, sunny, clear and cold, that we felt we must mark the festive occasion by an expedition to the Arab "university town," some nine miles distant, taking our midday meal with us and returning in the late afternoon. Lisette had given instructions for a vehicle to be in readiness at ten o'clock and we descended, well wrapped up and with a bundle of rugs to find — the small crowd, which invariably gathers, surrounding a coster barrow of unusual length suitable for the transport of flour sacks, drawn by one donkey (the donkey of our visit to the Moulin Ferrero) and Gaston in attendance! Great wrath on the part of us both, finally launched at the head of old Tati, the cook (who, our panier of food in hand timidly suggested placing a couple

of chairs on the planks) whereupon she hastily retired into the hotel and we followed, very disappointed at the failure of our plans.

However, Abdurahman rose to this occasion and went off to search the town, with the result that after waiting four hours we were again informed our carriage stopped the way. This time it was a small and ancient waggonette drawn by two dilapidated mules, and with Gaston on the box, and the whole staff of the Inn to see us off, we at length got away. Taking the road past the Fort, with high hills on our right and the infirmary buildings skirting a wide uneven plain with deep fissures on our left, we began a gradual ascent. Soon were hemmed in by mountains on either side, though now and again a gap in the range enabled us to catch fleeting glimpses of an illimitable stretch of sand, behind us as far as eye could reach, until it was lost in the pure blue of the sky line. Branching off from the main road to one less frequented, yet wonderfully good, we pursued our way into more open country where telegraph poles intruded on the solitudes to form a connecting link with that busy, hustling world so foreign to this great silence that, but for their reminder, it might very well have ceased to be.

Presently we passed a large low circle of small stones thrown carelessly on top of each other and flanked by a luxuriant spreading bush hung with rags. Here, on Fridays, the faithful meet for prayer: it is a sacred place and, in this instance,

most probably a sign post by the way, a *regoûba*,[1] to show that within measurable distance there lies enshrined the body of a saint. Difficult as it is to account for many of the customs in this strange land, it has been suggested that the pious, by fastening a rag to a shrub, or adding another flint to the heap, thus salute from afar their illustrious dead. Something there is of pathos in the extreme poverty expressed by these, the humblest of all, offerings of the nomad who, having neither silver nor gold to bestow, gives "of his best:" a strip of his vestment and a stone from the rocky bosom whereon he lays his head.

On the look out now for our destination, rounding a bend of the road, there came suddenly into full view a city set upon a hill, sheltered and guarded by a great rose brown mountain, seemingly the abode of the sun just flooding the sky with the amber and red gold of his setting. This a seminary for priests! this great stronghold with a multitude of loopholes piercing its walls, and so protected by natural defences that vehicles can only approach to within half a mile! Quite taken by surprise we descended from our waggonette and picked our way carefully down a steep ravine with loose stones, leading to the bed of the river, where a delicious scent of odorant leaves filled the air from a hedge on the right hand skirting a palm garden. High above our heads, on a cliff facing the town, we saw crouching forms looking down at us from over its edge;

[1] Circle or horseshoe of stones.

then moving away doubtless to give warning of the arrival of *rouama*.[2] We crossed the river on stepping stones, followed the winding of the stream a little way, then recrossed to pass under a curious natural arch which connects two hills by forming a narrow ledge between them, and soon found ourselves ascending the rocky steep of the town. At once, as if scales had fallen from our eyes, it took on a peaceful aspect! The fortifications turned into jagged edges of rock and rough terraces on which stood mud houses, or within which the inhabitants had burrowed: whilst the loopholes, with danger lurking behind, resolved themselves into the narrow prison slits in pairs where the rays of a too brilliant sun gain grudging admission and by illuming the corners of each primitive abode only serve to throw its centre into yet deeper shade.

The strange transition was but another instance of the alterations which effect themselves in the landscapes of the Sahara, giving birth to the folk lore which harps upon wonders wrought by the wands of magicians. A spirit embodied of all the ancient mysteries enshrined in that city must hover above it, weaving a spell to daunt the curious, but perchance fainthearted, from approaching its precincts: even yet striving in a ceaseless endeavour to shield by illusion what brute force has rudely laid bare to the gaze of the infidel.

Men were scattered about; some working, some idling and a few children ran out to look at us,

[2] Christians: foreigners.

though keeping a safe distance, but never a sign of a *mel'hafa,* or the flutter of a veil: not a glimpse did we get throughout the whole of our visit of one of those statuesque shrouded figures, so alluring by the very secrecy of their grace and hidden charms.

Lisette with the nimbleness of a mountain goat sprang up some great boulders on the right to feast her eyes on the surrounding country so exquisitely lighted; whilst I, more soberly, climbed the road and was met half way up to its summit by the interpreter. He, the only Arab in that town who can speak French, is by virtue of his rôle a concession to foreign rule and civilisation. —"Are you two quite alone?" was his first question, and "What relation is the other one to you? Your daughter?" (this due to Lisette's superior agility!) his next. I replied a little vaguely that someone was in attendance with a carriage and that the lady was my friend. He repeated "friend" after me with a puzzled expression, and I have since learned that people who go about together, of whatever sex or nationality, are presumably always near relations.

By this time Lisette had joined us where we had halted outside the square white Mosque which crowns the hill, and has the heart of the town in its keeping; sheltering within its walls the body of its saint, to visit which pilgrims come from far and near, presenting their alms to the *M'rabet,*[3] the holy man and presiding genius of this community of peasant folk and students. He stood now, awaiting us,

[3] This M'rabet has since died.

at the portals of the *Zaouïa,*[4] his expression faintly amused, slightly curious, and perhaps a little hard. Wrapped in the folds of a coffee coloured *burnous,* the hood of which was drawn over his head: with large dark brown eastern eyes set wide apart in a somewhat fleshy face, he might very well have passed for a rather coarse elderly woman, but for his immense nose, too heavy even for a big man. A strange office his, charged with the duties of adviser; reminiscent of byegone days of mysteries and priest magicians, whence probably it had its origin: a heritage of certain families, handed on from one member to another, not even excluding women — think of it! — in a country where they are held in such universal contempt.

Lélla Zéyneb, the last *M'rabta* of this hill town, died but a few years since, and so beneficent had been her sway, so charitable was she that "her memory is still green in the hearts of her people," and by children her name is spoken as one would whisper that of a revered saint, with awe and to bear witness to the truth of some statement they have made which is open to suspicion. Versed in the art of healing, French as well as Arab women brought their ailing babies to her, that she should lay her hands upon them; and though she had many suitors — being rich — she devoted herself to the care of the poor and needy and so lived unmarried till her death.

Hard and stony is his path who follows after so

[4] Mosque where the Koran is taught.

much sanctity and Lélla Zéyneb's successor by no means enjoys an equally exalted reputation. Certainly it was in somewhat disdainful fashion he acknowledged, in our presence, the salutations of his humble followers, who stooped low to kiss the edge of his *burnous* and by the Arabs he is secretly considered to be avaricious and worldly.

Not long ago, a certain royal lady, who was travelling in Algeria, intimated the wish to honour him by a visit. Much impressed by the grandeur of her connections in Europe, the *M'rabet* spared neither trouble nor expense to entertain her fittingly at a sumptuous luncheon; anticipating in return a decoration, at *least,* from the King, her brother. Judge then of the blow to his feelings, from which he has not yet recovered, when, as the only acknowledgment of his lavish hospitality the lady in question presented him with her photograph!

However far from grace in the eyes of the faithful, the *M'rabet* is a courteous, kindly host to "guests sent by God;" the formula used by Arab travellers when they find themselves amongst a tribe to whom they are entire strangers. He accompanied us into the *Zaouïa* to the spacious railed enclosure where the saint lies buried (together with his brother and daughter) in a great tomb draped with green, yellow and red, the colours of Islam.

It was the hour of *mogh'reb,* the fourth invocation of the day when the sun sinks to his rest; and in the prevailing twilight of the sanctuary, shadowy, pale robed figures came and went, or knelt on large

patterned mats of straw facing an ornamental niche, its base level with the floor, which indicates the exact direction of the sacred city and so ensures the validity of prayer. Nought else, save to the left of the *mihrâb,* the preacher's empty chair, and four slender columns, to uphold the roof, forming a large square in their midst where light drifted in vague round and oblong patches from the coloured apertures of glass in the circular high dome.

Hither, to the centre of the Mosque come the professors to expound the tenets of the Koran: law and religion, one and indivisible: the beginning and the end of wisdom for all time: God's final word to humanity. In Algeria, the Mussulman, whether he belong to the Hanefites or the Malekites (both orthodox sects) has kept his faith practically intact with a strong impress upon it of local tradition and colouring. Few missionaries of other creeds come here. Realising that they would spend their energies in vain, they have for the most part followed the advice of Mgr. le Roy, to leave the Mussulman in peaceful fatalistic submission to the Divine Will after the manner enjoined by the Prophet.

To learn the Koran by heart is a merit, and to read it, as interpreted by the "Fathers" of Islam in seven different ways, a science. Whether certain chapters are of greater worth than others forms a subject of high debate, a thorny ground for argument: the hundredth name of God, a basis for endless conjecture. It is known only to prophets and saints, the great initiates: but the remaining ninety

and nine are common property, each one bearing its own special significance and having its peculiar advantages if frequently repeated at a certain hour, or after one of the five canonical prayers. For instance, to recite *Mouhaïmn* (guardian) an hour and a half after *eûcha,* when the brief twilight has merged suddenly into complete darkness and the fifth, and last, prayer has been spoken, brings in the night watches true visions to the dreamer of all the future holds in store. More than this, the true believer who for many years has repeated at the close of each day the name of *Aziz,* meaning sweet, ninety-four times in succession (that being the numerical value of the letters composing it) may confidently expect, not only an abundance of riches, but also the fulfilment of his heart's desire.

The teacher, seated oriental fashion on the ground against a pillar of the Mosque, with his little group of students crouching around him, directs the suppression of final sounds in certain verses of the Sacred Book, prolongs, or abbreviates an articulation; settles the precise enunciation of each written word. Here then are mental gymnastics sufficient for the lifetime of the scholars to the satisfactory exclusion of all else! A few, perhaps already members of some mystic confraternity, even future *M'rabets,* spend their entire days in these studies and in prayer, and all, at least to outward seeming, are ascetics. They are lodged at a stone's throw from the Mosque, in a long row of one-storied low-roofed dwellings, all united, each cell the counterpart

of the rest. The one we visited was occupied by a professor, who rose at our entrance from a large straw mat spread in the corner, having but a single small pillow. The bare white walls were partly screened off by his clothing obviously just washed and hanging across the little room to dry: a square box called a *soudouk* held the rest of his possessions. He was studying from a printed copy of the Koran, but showed us another, more highly prized because handwritten with laborious care in the Arab character, which, with its twirls and flourishes and curves, its frequent touches of colour, its glint of gold when the name of *Allah* appeared, made of each page a picture.

Judging by his slight build; his refined face, with its somewhat weak chin, framed in a white *haïk;* his gentle bearing; this savant, of thirty years or so, must rule his classes by suasion rather than by force. He seemed so entirely a part of his simple surroundings, very far away from the mundane affairs of life, a scholarly recluse and visionary, whose peace had been rudely broken by our worldly selves, so that we hesitated to advance beyond the threshold of his cell and soon left him once more to his dreaming.

As we retraced our steps the *M'rabet,* through the interpreter, offered us coffee, an invariable custom of this country. Hospitality is a sacred duty, so much so that for an Arab to refuse it, unless he can plead that he is under a vow to fast, is worse than a discourtesy: is, in fact, an injury to his host. The daylight, unfortunately, was fast dying, and we were

unwillingly obliged to avail ourselves of the privileges of foreigners by urging the necessity of an immediate departure before nightfall. With a courteous interchange of pleasant speeches, including much praise from us of their lovely country which rejoices the Arab's heart, we hastened away just as the sun vanished on the further side of his rose brown home. He left behind him a beautiful luminous glow which lingered in the sky whilst we sped on to find our waggonette. As we drove away, looking a long farewell at that strange city on the hill, again the scene was changed. We gazed on a mountain fortress which we had been graciously permitted to enter for a brief space, to catch but a fleeting glimpse of its elusive mysteries, which may be revealed only to the faithful followers of Islam. A thin haze of blue smoke rose slowly till town, and hill and Mosque a'top of all were hid from sight, completely veiled by a thick curtain from this outside world of disillusion and realities. Abruptly the light faded out of the sky and all the land was dark.

. . . . . .

We had proceeded some distance when we heard shouting and could dimly discern figures moving by the roadside. Presently a woman's voice, pitched in the high key of anxiety and excitement called to us in French to stop and help her. It was one of the schoolmistresses, who had taken advantage of her holiday to go with some of her small pupils for a picnic; but the mule she had borrowed from the Arab master had escaped and was kicking up its

heels, evading capture, in high glee at such unexpected freedom.

We were several kilomètres from home and Lisette offered her the only vacant seat in our vehicle but, frightened though she was, she could not leave the children, nor yet the mule which would soon have been annexed by wandering nomads. Gaston tried, with many wiles, to trap the creature, but without a lasso and a horse the task was hopeless, so promising to send help shortly we drove quickly away. The moon rose, flooding the earth save where we were between the mountains, in a land of deep shadows till we reached the open road and saw a ball, more red than silver, hanging suspended above the town.

Right ahead lights bobbed and flickered, which proved to be the lanterns of a search party. We were hailed by the Arab schoolmaster who was in great anxiety about his mule and perhaps, incidentally, his European colleague. On hearing Gaston's brief explanation, he rapped out a French oath and, without a "bye your leave" or apology, boarded our chariot to get back the quicker for help. He is, no doubt, a fair specimen of that unpleasant state of transition when a little book learning and small authority under the new order brings the affliction known as swelled head and a total forgetfulness of the traditional native courtesy which still exists, with all its charm, amongst the more unlettered.

In their policy of assimilation; their endeavour to create a "France over the water" of their col-

ony, divided into " departements " like the mother country, the chief medium employed by the French is the communal school. To it go French, Arabs and Jews, all on an equal footing learning the same lessons. It amuses Lisette to put Abdallah through his paces when he pays us a chance visit, with a lurking hope of a few sous for coffee, a toy aeroplane, or some other treasure from that vaguely wonderful city of Paris. He, nothing loath, feet bare, *burnous* in rags, his thin oval face with large brown eyes full of intelligence, pours forth a mass of undigested information, principally events in French history: and told us the other day with great emphasis and a hint of amusement that it was the *English* who had burned alive " la Sainte Jeanne D'Arc ! "

After this exhibition of learning we all went out together: he following in our wake, greatly charmed with a pair of blackened eyeglasses, which he used with great effect as we passed through the Ghetto, " pour regarder les Juifs " as he told us, contempt in his tones, and voicing for everyone of his race their disdain and hatred for the Jew, who, little by little, lays hold, where he can, of their heritage.

Thus it may be very well to rub shoulders in school hours, but when playtime comes it is another matter. If Paulus, the hotel bull dog, getting bored with Mrs. Paulus and her squealing brown puppies, noses out a dirty cotton rag and invites the Briffa's fox terrier to a tug of war in the Square, French and Jew boys join merrily in the fun: or, together they will tease some Arab woman till she runs out of her

house to throw stones at them: but should you see a little group, squatting on heels, close up, each *burnous* a shade dingier than its neighbour's, some plain, others striped brown and red — a little company of snails and caterpillars — they are all Arabs with a dozen or so of coloured marbles, or a row of knuckle bones, a stone and a steady aim.

The favourite pastime of the men amongst the poorer class is draughts. After midday, in almost any street, outside a café or the Turkish baths, absorbed players can be seen squatting on large straw mats, with perhaps a low stool between them on which the board rests, every alternate square depressed and the men of two different shapes, not varying in colour like ours. Lazier folk look on meanwhile; or lie, rolled up, against the walls; their heads completely covered by their hoods and propped up on the shoes they have just taken off, in the soundest of sound sleep which nothing short of a cannonade would disturb.

CHAPTER VIII

FANTASIA

"Occasion precieuse de revêtir des costumes brillants, de faire galoper dans le vent et la fumée quelques chevaux fougueux et surtout de faire parler la poudre." ISABELLE EBERHARDT.

December 29th, 1912.

AS the year draws to its close, from my post of observation on the balcony, I witness many departures and farewells. One morning it is the tirailleur officer who sends off his baggage on a camel before he comes in to breakfast with his late Chief, and they make pretty speeches to each other over a bottle of champagne. Another day the red Cavaliers, followed by a crowd of well wishers, take the road to Djelfa and Laghouat; and then, one sunless afternoon, a little company of *Mokhazni,*[1] picturesque Cavaliers of the blue *burnous,* dismount at the corner to rest their hands on the shoulders of old friends; or turn in their saddles for one last long backward look, leaving no doubt many sore hearts behind them and mine amongst the number!

Last night the civilians arrived in sombre official uniforms of black, French-grey and silver.

[1] Soldiers of the blue burnous.

Here then is a golden opportunity for fêtes and *fantasia!*[2] The M'Zabites have organised their welcome " all on their own wild lone " for they and the Arabs have no sympathies, no ideas, hardly the same creed, in common; and mutually detest each other. Abdallah has impressed upon me more than once that there are five distinct races of people in the world, and he counts them out on his own fingers as follows: First, the real Arabs; second, the French; third, the English; fourth, the Jews; fifth and last, the M'Zabites.

There is a fair number of them trading in this place and they muster in the Square in full force " to make the powder speak." Forming into two lines, say six abreast, they rush forward; the first row faces round suddenly in the centre to confront those following behind and, simultaneously, about a dozen old blunderbusses are fired straight into the earth. There ensues a deafening din; clouds of smoke; gravel flying in all directions.

It seems a most dangerous amusement with such antique weapons, which, moreover, take an endless time to load, and it is not surprising that hands are frequently blown right off. Luckily, no such fatality occurs today and the performers do so enjoy themselves, flinging their guns into the air and springing up to catch them with a great display of lemon coloured leather boots, with green devices, that would do honour to a pantomime at Drury Lane. A clown creates much mirth by imitating

[2] Festivity; frivolity.

them, rushing about with a long green wand, cut at the top into a triangle, which he pretends is a gun to the delight of the onlookers; amongst whom I see many foresters in the rich green *burnous* suggestive of the beautiful woods they protect, and Arab police in dark blue uniforms with wide belts of rose colour.

Of the old régime but a few are left to hand over affairs to the new comers, and the Commandant being practically quite dead, the Arab chiefs have come in, from the surrounding district, with their mounted followers, to pay their respects to his successor and to cry, " Long live the Administrator and the French Republic."

At every available point flags flutter joyfully in the breeze and, from the far distance, comes the sound of martial music, recalling the bagpipes of my own country till, at close quarters, the resemblance fades. It is the melancholy strains of the *quaïta* [3] which strike upon my ear, mingled with the tramp of many horses and the measured beat of the *bnader*.[4]

Though it has been very cold of late, with frosty nights, and we cannot be far off the winter rains, today the sun is en fête, as he should be of course on so important an occasion. He never thinks of shirking his duties in the Sahara, and he shines gloriously on the colours of Islam floating at the head of this gay cavalcade and on the banners of the Aghas, as they round the corner of the Square, which pres-

[3] Flute.

[4] Tomtom.

ently is filled with the prancing, curvetting, restless chargers of the *Goum*.[5]

Oh! the delight of displaying their magnificent horsemanship before the admiring crowd; of reining in their nervous restless steeds, pawing the air in their excitement at the tumult; or, of backing them into the little knot of onlookers at their heels.

The Caïds make a fine show in the official *burnous* of bright scarlet, on top of a white one, finely woven. The hood of the latter is sometimes brought over and falls on the back, like a Carmelite friar's, unless there is a magnificent gold tassel to dangle effectively above the high-backed saddle adorned with an inlay of gold. Their *haïks* and long *guenader* are of white silk and when, with a superb gesture, a dandy flings his red mantle back over his shoulder displaying the silken sheen beneath, he also shows off its pale blue edging and the arabesques embroidered in bright yellow silk which beautify the corner. Is it any wonder that they are swollen with pride, these Caïds; have " fantasia in the head " as Abdallah expresses it? They are booted with rose red *filali*[6] with golden acorns on the insteps and two or three of them boast a surprising number of decorations, which put just the finishing touch to their official splendour.

For a full half hour the scene is a wonderful kaleidoscope of shifting colours, but at length the fragments settle and assume a more definite shape. The

[5] Mounted followers of an Arab Chieftain. (Pronounced Goom).
[6] From Tafilalet, in Oran where the leather is prepared.

Goum line the Square on both sides and the Administrator, his aides and the officers group themselves at the corner — athwart from where I sit — at the foot of the hilly road which leads past the Fort.

Immediately facing me, on a beautiful grey charger with a saddle cloth of crimson velvet, its trappings inlaid with gold and with gilded box stirrups, is a very great personage indeed. Attired in a long coat of red velvet, lined with silk of a lighter shade and richly embroidered with gold thread; his handsome bearded face framed in a *haïk* of white silk, he and his gaily caparisoned steed transport me out of this prosaic age to a far away era before the coming of *rouama.* Similarly clad and magnificently mounted, remote ancestors of his swept across the sandy plains of the desert at the head of troops of wild tribesmen shouting barbaric battle cries to sack a *Ksar* [7] or to avenge a wrong.

Absolutely haughtily impassive, his demeanour never changes. No shade of feeling is permitted to disturb that set countenance of his, not even when his little son of twelve in a sombre suit of maroon acquits himself so bravely, galloping wildly on his black pony to salute the representative of France and racing past the little group of officers, away out of sight up the hill. For the Fantasia is in full swing now and for an hour or more, in twos and threes and fours, the Mokhazni and the tribesmen charge across the Square, from end to end, rising in their stirrups

[7] Headquarters of a tribe.

with the crack, crack, crack of their rifles and waving their gleaming sword blades in the sun.

This of course has been quite an unusual occasion; but in every year there is a red letter day when the *Goum* invariably muster in full force to take their share in the great annual event of the races.

Then the grand stand is packed to overflowing with spectators, for visitors come from Algiers, from France, from England, even from America; the centre seats are filled with them and Arabs occupy long rows of benches either side. Even so, this is but the smallest portion of the swarm of onlookers, for every available point of vantage on the hilly ground behind, which commands at least some portion of the course, is crowded with knots of white draped excited men. The women too are allowed to cover the house tops, to see the luckier sex go by from a safe distance, and always closely veiled. The dancing girls, dressed out in all their finery, are brought in *basours* [8] on camels, which are made to kneel in a row close to the Judge's box, thus bringing the bejewelled painted idols down to the level of a curious mob.

Suddenly everyone is quiet . . . waiting in breathless expectation. Far off a low rumbling noise as of thunder . . . it approaches . . . nearer . . . nearer. People rise from their seats . . . push forward with keen only half suppressed excitement.

Wild war music; galloping hoofbeats; confused

[8] Large open basket over which curtains are drawn. A sort of litter.

sense of the forces of air let loose on the earth; brief vision of veiled faces, of foam flecked chargers, of mantles and draperies swept out by the breeze and a great body of horsemen sweeps past like the wind. . . . They are here. . . . They are gone. . . . Clouds of dust follow them, cover them, hide them; blind the spectators. Silence again.

They have cleared, now, the furthest point; rounded the race-course, the screams of the dancing girls cheering them, urging them on. Spurring their maddened steeds, in a compact mass they come . . . an incarnate warcloud . . . they charge . . . as into battle. Like Jove's thunderbolt, in a flash they are here again . . . like a flash they have gone.

It is over! That wonderful Ride of the *Goum!*

CHAPTER IX

AN INFALLIBLE CURE

"The Mou'abbir [1] *must be educated, learned in the Koran and in dogma, know Arabic well, be experienced in mankind, be chaste, pure, sincere."*

E. Doutté.

February 28th, 1913.

FOR some weeks past I had seen nothing of Abdallah, nor heard his voice beneath my balcony asking permission to come and see me after school, or better still on Sunday. Was it because the weather had been cold and wet of late? Extraordinarily cheerless too, and his mauve cotton *gandoura* (which looks so gay in the sunshine) and his ragged *burnous* are inadequate garments to keep the rain off his lithe brown body. Certainly it was no great surprise to me that, when he came at length the other afternoon, his face looked drawn and pinched and his sombre black eyes larger than ever and unnaturally bright.

"Yes, he had had fever," he said dejectedly in answer to my queries, "and very badly too." However his uncle, a *mou'abbir*, had given him a wonderful talisman, which was never known to fail, so the

[1] Holy man.

ague (the work of the *djinns,* who are the cause of all maladies) had been driven out of him and only the weakness and great lassitude remained.

Why had he not come to me for quinine?

He had taken some of the tabloids which were left over from the last attack, but it was evident he had little faith in the drug and much more in the exorcisms of his revered relative and the *h'erz* [2] he had given him.

Did he think that, for a moderate fee, the *mou-'abbir* could be induced to write a *h'erz* for me to cure, say, headache?

Oh, yes! of that he had no doubt, or for any other pain, including love too and jealousy; but, on no account must I offer him any payment for it. A *mou-'abbir* who sold a *h'erz* would be very badly thought of indeed.

This was awkward, for I could hardly ask his uncle to make me a present of one of his precious medical prescriptions. As yet, I had not even a bowing acquaintance with the old man, whom I remembered seeing about the town, obviously respected and respectable, wearing a large pair of steel rimmed glasses which assist in making him look the *t'âleb* [3] he is reputed to be. Perhaps, however, the difficulty might be overcome in some way and as infallible cures are well worth having and not always available, I ventured to suggest to Abdallah that he should make an appointment for me as, and when,

[2] Meaning a preservative.

[3] Scholar.

possible. Should we say Thursday next? The seventh[4] day of the week is accounted fortunate for fresh undertakings, as it was on a Thursday the chief butler entered Joseph's prison, and Mahomet returned to the Sacred City.

Yesterday, therefore, the pair of us met at the old man's house in the Arab town and were received by his daughter, who has just been divorced by her husband and has returned, with an infant, to live with her father. From what it was possible to glean, in a very short interview, of her experiences in life, she did not appear to have inherited any of the saintly proclivities of her venerable parent.

Quite the best and most airy portion of the hut was inhabited by a donkey, so I was relieved to hear that the consultation would take place on the terrace above, where we would be undisturbed. In the strong sunlight of the early afternoon we found the *mou'abbir* patiently awaiting us, looking very patriarchal in snow white garments, with a long rosary round his neck of olive wood beads, by means of which he is said to divine. Beside him lay some large sheets of paper, a pen and a bottle of *smoq*,[5] for I had impressed upon Abdallah that my *h'erz* must be of the best in all respects and written with magic ink, which is a preparation of animal black obtained from carbonised wool diluted with water.

After we had exchanged the customary greetings, I seated myself in the shade, on a large square piece

[4] Counting from Friday, the Mahometan Sunday.

[5] Magic ink.

of matting covered with a red *melh'afa* opposite to the picturesque specialist on all diseases of mind and body and informed him that I wished to be cured of pains in the head.

He nodded sagely and, as a preliminary, rose and came over to me with a sheet of paper in his hand which he waved slowly seven times round my hat, murmuring an exorcism, or incantation. He then reseated himself in his whitewashed corner and, after enquiring my " little " (christian) name, which he had great trouble to pronounce and transcribe, he set to work to write the infallible cure.

As this promised to be a lengthy proceeding, I invited the daughter and a friend with a baby to keep me company on my mat and they allowed me to examine their trinkets and the various fandangles which all Arab women hang about their persons.

Of these the most charming and novel to me was an article peculiar to this place called a *maroued,* consisting of a rudely chased silver tube, with a moveable top, to hold *koh'eul* and attached by a chain to a holder in which was a pencil, about two inches long, made of the horn of a gazelle, burnt black. How often have I witnessed this important operation of the toilette, and have been instructed how to blacken my own eyebrows and, beneath my lashes, elongate my eyes in the most approved Arab fashion. It needs the aid of a mirror set in red leather sewn up with gay purple wool and protected by a little cover pierced with many holes, which

hangs on the breast, or at the waist, alongside a pocket matching in size and colour and perhaps another tube, full of perfume. Round the neck are pendant a multitude of articles of all shapes, sorts and sizes, mainly amulets and charms.

Half hidden by their draperies my friends wore talismans enclosed in a little piece of tawny or rose red leather fastened down with a latchet, as mine will be also, when presently completed. The *mou-'abbir's* daughter had chosen to guard herself against all kinds of sorcery; her visitor, from accidents by water; and both were protected from the much dreaded evil eye by "hands of Fatma," [6] suspended by silken threads studded thickly with cloves. *Khams,* as the Mussulmen call these curious little silver ornaments (from the word *khamsa,* meaning five), bear little resemblance to a real hand save for their five excrescences, but it seems to be the number itself which is so important and which runs seven very close in favour with the primitive inhabitants of Northern Africa. Perhaps it may be said that whilst seven belongs to the domain of magic, five has a beneficent religious significance. There are five dogmas in the Mussulman creed; five sacred duties to be performed by the true believer; five daily prayers to be said by him, each one with its five attitudes. Also the pentacle plays its part in written amulets, but evidently its properties are not suited to my case, for I saw at once that the *mou'abbir* had not used it,

[6] The Prophet's daughter.

but had inserted another figure in my talisman, to which a curious legend is attached and which is known by the name of Solomon's Seal.

The sign was engraved, so says the story, on a ring which gave the Jewish King dominion over *djinns* and animals. Being greatly enamoured of one of his concubines, he ordered a demon to erect for her a statue of her father as she desired, but which the young girl soon began to worship. This so offended the Almighty that he sent a devil to steal the ring by a ruse and thus deprive Solomon of the power he had misused, and it was only when God's wrath was appeased that the King was permitted to find the seal again in a fish.

Sometimes the intersected triangles enclose a star, sometimes the name of God, but in whatever form it appears, the figure is extremely popular in Algeria and the faith it engenders no doubt helps to effect the cures.

Thinking the séance was at an end I rose, preparatory to departure, but the old man made me reseat myself that he might again wave the paper round my head and mutter another incantation. Finally, he breathed three times on my toque, for the breath is the vital principle, of which the incantation is the concrete form and in Arabic there is but one word, *nefs,* for breath and soul.

He had evidently done all in his power, and that in good faith, and had expended some time and thought to cure my ills. What was I to do in return? Would he be so good as to accept a little

present from me wherewith to buy coffee? To this my physician was graciously pleased to give his assent and, feeling quite happy at my successful diplomacy, I was turning to go, when involuntarily I arrested my steps and stood for awhile motionless and silent, for, looking up at the neighbouring terrace, I saw — for the first time — Hafsâ.

CHAPTER X

HAFSÂ

"Ah! lorsque le coeur est mort
Rien ne saurait le faire renaître."

ARAB SONG.

"I think that there is something killed in me."

SHE was bending slightly forward with a look on her face of a faint surprise at what was happening beneath her. One slim little hand with its fragile wrist, always a sign of an old, old race, was poised on the balustrade, pale olive against its whiteness. She had the appearance of a beautiful wild bird, just ready for flight and her eyes too conveyed this idea, having lost something out of them that makes for the ordinary maiden. Woman she was not, nor child, as she stood there: her pale oval face framed by a blue silk *mendil* shot through with bright green; tiny crosses tatooed under her lips (which had no need of carmine to tint them) and on her cheeks — untouched by *khaloûk*.[1] The sun, pouring his pitiless searching beams right down on her, could illumine no flaw; but, rather, he sought to envelope her in his radiance and lent all his aid to enhance her loveliness, as he would an exquisite jewel

[1] Rouge.

set round with the gleam of emeralds and turquoise. Tales I had heard of the charms Arab men wear to protect themselves from the wiles of *djinn* women, who come to earth to bewitch them, floated into my mind; and, even as I gazed, spellbound, she was suddenly gone and I realised she had been out on the terrace unveiled and alone. For the storm that had raged for a few months in her life had left her coldly indifferent to the comments of others. Was anything more left to be said? They could say it.

She was Hafsâ, I knew, daughter of old Mohamed-ben-Sayïa, who had been foolishly fond of her, carrying her about on his outstretched arms, as one would a doll, dressed in nile green gossamer scattered over with bouquets of roses; tiny anklets clinking above her red shoes and her little wrists laden with bangles. How other men laughed when they saw him! Had the child been a boy, they could have well understood it, but a girl! . . .

Thus a great love had sheltered her early childhood till her father died, leaving his adored little daughter in the charge of Aly, the worthless, and of Fatima, her handsome — and soon notorious — mother. As much neglected now as she had once been cared for, and left almost entirely to herself and her own devices, she spent her days crouched against the lintel of the doorway, making a *sahfa*[2] with mud from the street, or fashioning a rag doll to take her out walking at *Ennaïr,* as do all little Arab girls at the fête of the New Year.

[2] A large shallow dish.

Poor old Mohamed-ben-Sayïa's body must often have turned in its grave by the sand dunes, with horror that his Hafsâ should thus be exposed outside the house, in company with children of a poorer, lower grade: for, growing bolder, she began to wander on the slopes of the river bed amongst the *defla,* and it was there that Meunier saw her and took her as a model for his masterpiece.

He found her one day under an almond tree that was shedding its flowers, as the fresh breeze swayed its branches to and fro in the sunshine. She was seated: her arms clasped about her knees — such a winsome, caressing, joyous human creature with a childish prettiness that bears but a faint resemblance to the weird, uncanny beauty of the Hafsâ of to-day.

Her little face was turned upwards to greet with glee the showers of fragile blossoms that, lightly, tenderly brushing her olive cheek, fell around her and slipped into the red drapery — all open at the throat — which outlined the suppleness and grace of her slender form.

So Meunier painted her, in the soft languid days of late spring, calling his picture, " Baisers d'Amandier."

He was at all times an enthusiast about his work and now every fibre within his being responded to the strange loveliness of his surroundings; to a life so like — he being French — and yet so wholly different from that lived in the West; to the feast of colour, which stirred his senses; and, above all, to the luminous atmosphere, which is all the glory and

the charm of these towns of the desert. He became ecstatic, as with a vision; and he painted, painted always, day after day, utterly absorbed in his work, throughout the gorgeous springtime into summer and failed to see that with a suddenness, as the twilight fades into night in these tropical regions; or, as swift as the change from dawn into morning, so Hafsâ had passed into girlhood.

After his great picture was finished, he began to make another study of her in the Arab house which he had adapted to his needs, with its wide terraces commanding a superb view over the race course and the sand dunes to the amethyst mountains beyond. From time to time, friends dropped in to see him, for he was popular with men and, when his work was done for the day, he was glad to welcome his comrades of the brush, or the officers for whom time dragged somewhat wearily in that far away little garrison. Especially for one, the young Lieutenant Balard, who was but newly arrived, yet already lamenting his boredom; and not being too considerate of others, he began to present himself unasked whilst the artist was still at work in his studio. Always goodnatured and feeling the re-action set in after his long weeks of toil however enchanting — Meunier refrained from saying nay to his too frequent visitor; who, moreover, was bright and entertaining enough to amuse him. He had even thought of someday painting the handsome vivacious face, though it was distinctly marred by its air of too great a self-satisfaction and its somewhat weak chin. That

Hafsâ was an attraction to the young officer never seems to have occurred to Meunier, and however much Balard may have looked at the model, in his presence he rarely exchanged a word with her.

On Midsummer Day, the sittings came to an end. Promising Hafsâ that he would return in September to paint her again, and smiling kindly into the troubled brown eyes that looked back so sorrowfully into his, Meunier departed to seek a cooler clime.

When he had gone Hafsâ, without occupation or resource of any kind, wandered about again, as had been her wont; and at once the lieutenant began to waylay and importune her with such Arabic as he had at his disposal together with the language which needs not words. Altogether lonely and sorely missing the artist, the girl at first may have shown herself passive to this love making; but soon she began to get frightened and even to actively dislike her admirer; fled, when she saw him coming, and hid herself as best she might.

Balard, having by this time quite lost his head; when his vanity was wounded, lost also all sense of decency; went straightway to Aly and demanded Hafsâ of him.

The household was straitened in its means since Meunier's departure, for he had paid his model well and her life with her mother and Aly had for a time been more tolerable in consequence. Apart from this, Aly wanted to marry and had not the wherewithal to purchase a bride. It occurred to him that it would be an excellent arrangement to sell his sis-

ter to the French officer for a good round sum, with which he could buy Nakhla for himself.

How much Hafsâ resisted, who can say? A girl has no rights: she is the property of her parents and may be disposed of as they think fit. Her kind old father was dead long since. Fatima always on Aly's side had no objection to offer; only mother and son, both dearly loving *fantasia* and excitement, stipulated that there must be a marriage.

Balard held out against this farce for a long time: offered more money instead, much more than he could afford being already in debt to the Jews; but Aly stood firm, deeming his own dignity at stake. He and Fatima played on the lieutenant; telling him that they were sending Hafsâ away; were going to marry her to someone else, till the man, half crazy by now, yielded.

One night, clad in a *burnous* like any Arab, preceded by the banging of tomtoms and by torches and lighted candles: half blinded by the smoke of innumerable squibs let off at his feet; and surrounded by a herd of men and children marching in noisy procession, the Frenchman led to his house the silent, closely veiled figure of Hafsâ. Naturally there was a scandal; to be followed a few days later by more talk, for the girl ran away; to her mother who should have given her protection, but did not. She was taken back to Balard again and the matter was hushed up.

For a few weeks all was quiet: nothing was heard, or seen, of Hafsâ.

Then, sooner than he had said, or intended; in the early days of September, when it is still unbearably hot at noontide, but the light of the morning is golden and the sun sets over an enchanted land, Meunier came back.

He had hardly set foot in the place when his ears were assailed by the hideous story of the mock marriage and what had followed it. With a sense of dismay he realised how he had himself been to blame, unwittingly of course, but still how culpable, and went straightway to find Aly, whom he met just outside Fatima's house. Where was his model? Aly, with a great show of importance, said she was married and referred Meunier to *his friend,* Lieutenant Balard. Whereupon the artist, wrathful even to folly, cursed Aly in his own tongue and knocked him down.

This scene was witnessed by Abdallah, Aly's half brother, who loathed his father's elder son and who had secretly resented the sale of Hafsâ to a *roumi,*[3] whom, both by law and religion (which are one and indivisible) she was forbidden to marry.

Perhaps it was he, who conveyed the news of Meunier's return to his poor little half sister, for next day she ran away for the second time from Balard and again took refuge with her mother.

About nine o'clock that evening the artist was smoking his pipe on the little green balcony in front of his house when he saw Abdallah racing towards him and with all speed went down to meet him.

[3] Stranger; Christian.

Breathless and panting, the boy implored him to come. Hafsâ had sent him. She had run away. Aly was trying to drag her back. There was no time to be lost.

When they arrived at Fatima's house the door was shut and surrounded by a curious, gaping crowd, attracted thither by the sounds of weeping and scolding within. Aly, it seemed, had gone to fetch the lieutenant and the pair presently made their appearance, the Frenchman swaggering on ahead, already enraged by Hafsâ's desertion, and still more so, when he saw Meunier awaiting him. He began by blustering, to overawe the Arabs by his official position, and a violent altercation ensued between the two men. Then, with Aly's help, he tried to gain admission into the house where, on no pretext could the artist have followed them, without committing a breach of the conventions which would never have been tolerated.

Meunier would soon have been overpowered had not Abdallah, the quickwitted, already dashed off to summon his brother artists to his aid, knowing that they would rally to a man around their comrade, whilst Balard could hardly expect to find a backing. As a result the lieutenant was obliged to retire defeated, and Aly and Fatima were bound over with dire threats to leave the unhappy girl in peace for the night.

On this occasion the scandal was too great, and involved too many French, to be ignored by the authorities, and next day the storm broke, raging

around and altogether outside and apart from its unwilling cause who, by the very force of the torrent evoked was washed into a quiet backwater, where for her all was still.

The matter occupied days: even weeks. There was an inquiry: correspondence. The General came on his tour of inspection and interviewed Fatima. Lieutenant Balard was sent off to Algiers, there to await further orders.

Then, when he had gone, Hafsâ sought out Meunier.

He was painting in his studio when word was brought to him, to his dismay, that she was below asking to see him; and he hurried down the rough stone steps of the interior to find her seated on the *dokana* by the open doorway, but mercifully out of range of vision of the street and veiled. She was alone.

She had come to thank him, she said rather brokenly, for all his goodness in protecting her. The officer was gone at last, so she was free and had nothing more to fear. She might come back and be his model again now, might she not? She would do anything, anything for him. . . . The *Sidi* was not angry with her? . . . this timidly, for Meunier, standing in front of her, was very grave and silent.

She had thrown back her *melh'afa* and stood up before him. Viewing her, with the background of recent events, in quite another aspect, he thought how beautiful she was. Yes, quite sufficiently so to justify Balard's mad and cruel infatuation. If he

could only paint her just like this! He sighed involuntarily. Of course it was impossible. If she did not know it, he must tell her so. He could not have her coming to his house. He pulled his pipe out of his mouth and played with it nervously.

No, no! of course he was not angry with her, he said gently, but only very . . . terribly . . . distressed at what had happened to her. But . . . she must understand that everything was changed . . . quite changed. She could not be his model, or come to his house. . . . She was a woman now and must always be veiled before men . . . before himself. . . .

He had not been looking at her while he spoke, but just then, to emphasize his words he turned and met her gaze, and . . . oh! . . . Great . . . Heaven! . . .

He tried to speak but words failed him . . . and when he was able to pull himself together his voice sounded hoarse and hardly above a whisper. She must go back to her mother's house until . . . until . . . His voice failed again and hurriedly he motioned to her to put her *melh'afa* around her, and by a sheer effort of will almost hypnotised her to move towards the door. Accustomed to obeying his every word and gesture when posing for him, in a half dazed and intuitive fashion she followed him into the street.

The air and sunshine gave him courage, made her presence seem less intimate and he smiled now at her kindly and gravely, bidding her farewell.

She never moved or spoke, so he left her there, returning to his studio by the little flight of steps which led to the upper floor of his house.

As he entered he caught sight of the last study he had made of her. Poor little Hafsâ! Poor unhappy, unlucky little soul! With something that sounded almost like a sob, he took up the unfinished picture gently and, placing it behind some discarded canvases, turned its face towards the wall.

Unable to work again, he wandered aimlessly about the room, cursing his own blindness and absorption in his work; when, suddenly, the thought struck him to look out between the carved shutters which opened over the street.

Hafsâ was still standing where he had left her, impassive, statuesque.

"Was she never going?" he muttered impatiently, a sense of irritation and dismay growing up within him.

As if his words had really reached her, she turned immediately and he saw her pass out of the sunlight into the shadow of the Mosque.

In another moment she was gone.

. . . . . .

April 4th, 1913.

What a stir there has been in the town all day! Noise of tomtoms; wails of the *quaïta* and through and above all the din, the screams of the dancing girls. Wedding festivities on an unusually great scale must surely be afoot?

The marriage is being celebrated of the daughter

of Mohamed-ben-Sayïa, for which, it is rumoured, a large sum of money has been sent — no one quite knows from where or why!

So it is Hafsâ they are marrying, on this long drowsy afternoon, to an Arab from Algiers.

CHAPTER XI

THE RITES FOR RAIN

"Ici, par une singulière disposition d'esprit, nous sommes tojours sur la marge du merveilleux."
"DANS L'OMBRE CHAUDE DE L'ISLAM."

March 27th, 1913.

FOR a month, and more, we have enjoyed the delights and the beauties of springtime, the first day of which is fixed by the Arabs for the 27th of February. The fruit trees, peach, apricot, apple and almond have daintily blushed, or delicately whitened under the kiss of a passionate sun and look deliciously fragile and fairylike against the dense background a sombre mass of green palm trees affords them. It is ten days at least since their petals were ruthlessly plucked at and swept off by the chill breezes of evening: the fruit is set now: summer is coming. In this last week Nature made haste to celebrate her great annual festival and during three days — of ill augur to man — the stones, the plants and the trees have been consummating their nuptials.

The arid earth, bestrewn for awhile with showers of fruit blossom, is now a more novel delight and a daily amazement: for everywhere, amongst rocks and stones, in all sorts of unlikely places, are spring-

Kindly lent by Mrs. Mathews

Watching the Fantasia on the Race Course

ing up flowers, yellow, red, heliotrope, but mostly shaded from mauve into purple. Near the graveyards tiny irises bend and snap under one's feet — have not some Easterns christened them " Flowers of Death "? — and the mignonette, which is so small, and so green and so shy that it has to be sought for, is there too; and grows as well on the racecourse, which lies over against the sand dunes, at the approach to the town.

Thither it was that I bent my steps on this very day of last month, on the fête of *Melqa r rabî* [1] and met little parties of women coming back to their homes, laden with baskets of odorant herbs they had gathered, which they gave me to sniff at; and which, for health's sake, it is good to eat as well as to smell at this season.

The big plain by the racecourse was alive with young urchins, either watching or playing at *Koûra,* with a ball of wood, or of rags bound together with string and long thick sticks, curving upwards and widening at the base. To make them, no other wood must be used but that of the palm tree: on this point, my informant, Abdallah, is very insistent. He was there of course, and as usual full of importance explaining the game and overcome with surprise at my questions and that I should have already known of it, its name and its reason! For *Koûra* is by no means simply a sport and amusement: it has a religious significance and is often specially organised at other seasons of the year, if the earth should be

[1] First day of Spring.

dry and the vegetation drooping and dying for want of the rain.

The boys, divided into two camps, pushed the ball to and fro from one party to the other shouting the while, for on them it devolves thus to beat out, and frighten the *djinns* with a great noise: the bad little devils who would like to maintain a persistent drought and ruin the harvest.

As a matter of fact our own modern football had its origin in an ancient agrarian rite, of which *Koûra* is but a survival: and perhaps it might be wiser in England to encourage these clever little people for a time, who can at will control the clouds, instead of waging such continual warfare upon them.

Whether on that first day of spring the Arab boys failed to perform their duty efficiently; whether they were too apathetic and did not put their hearts and their full strength into their games, who can say? Whatever the reason, one thing is quite certain, that the *djinns* have completely got the upper hand for the present and riot at will. Day after day passes: the sun blazes always, with not a cloud in a sky of the most exquisite azure and no sign of rain.

Since last Monday the weather problem has begun to assume a very serious aspect, for about three o'clock each afternoon, as " a cloud that from some furnace strays " the sirocco has come up from out of the South and breathed hotly over a land already parched and fainting. Great whirlwinds of dust, and of sand from the shifting dunes, rise into the air

penetrating every crevice and chink; and the Arabs, with *haïks* drawn up above their nostrils, even their faces almost enshrouded in white linen, seem more remote and mysterious than before.

Last night a wave of excitement passed over the whole town and a climax was reached when the big auto arrived from Algiers soon after nine. There came back in it an ex-commissaire of Police, just out of jail where he had been spending a fortnight, at the instigation, so it is said, of the Jews — the Jews who corner the grain when famine stalks abroad in the land!

Party feeling here runs very high at times and the Arabs, suffering badly from nerves, were worked up to a somewhat dangerous mood and determined to look upon the ex-commissaire as a martyr. For quite two hours previous to his arrival, the noise of flutes and of tomtoms had reached us from the café at the further corner of the Square, and the approach of the car was signalled by a march past, headed by the musicians, to the terminus where it would stop. Back the procession came again, greatly increased in numbers, making a terrific din, and the whole crowd clapping their hands in unison with the beat of the tomtoms. Squibs were being fired off in all directions: pandemonium seemed let loose: the dark Square was full of tall white figures, moving, marching, running. Preceded by swinging lanterns, the musicians reached the centre, and just where the light focussed I could see from my balcony two men

fall into each other's arms, part, embrace again, one raise a *met'rek*[2] horizontally above his head and both simultaneously break into a wild dance.

Thus last night's ovation inaugurated the prescribed rites for the rain.

About midmorning I hurried down to the racecourse to find a crowd of men, old women and quite young children of both sexes already assembled for the *zerda,* the banquet of charity. The poorest of the poor were squatting on the plain, bunched up together in little circular groups of six or eight each, helping themselves hungrily from the *sahfa* set in their midst which had been filled from great steaming cauldrons of meat and grain coloured orange with hot pepper.

From a somewhat larger clump, of men only, came the beat of tomtoms which accompanied a low monotonous chant led by the oldest and most revered *mou'abbir* in the town. "O God! give us rain! We implore pardon, O God! The ear is dry, O Master! give it to drink!"

Their murmuring appeal was almost overpowered by the musicians of another group, where three men were playing on reed like flutes and others, raising their *bnader* high up above their heads, banged at them frenziedly, whilst one danced at intervals till his amulets on their long green cord swung round and hung down behind him. His example stimulated the efforts of two thickly veiled women who, with extended arms, hands turning inwards and out-

[2] Thick stick.

wards, were obviously flagging, till one flung herself into his close embrace. A *darwish*[3] rushed into the centre, swaying this way and that, leaping into the air, with no idea save one of continuous movement, till he, also exhausted, dropped like a log on the ground and lay still. An immense crowd looked on the while, mostly composed of men, but one corner was assigned to a number of little girls, all dressed in red, who bloomed close to the earth like a flower bed filled with dwarf roses, ringed round with statuesque figures of women, impassive and silent.

In the pause that ensued a pan of charred sweet smelling wood was brought round, a symbol of purification; and as the incense bearer threaded his way in and out through the crowd, there came across to us from that other group the continuous appeal: "O God! give us rain! *Djeldjâla,*[4] that the widow may live! O God! give us rain! Give us rain!"

Little handfuls of stones were picked up and flung far away over our heads on to the arid plain to let God see the hardness of the earth, so flintlike! And above us always a blazing pitiless sun: not a cloud to temper the noonday heat: no sign of rain.

In the afternoon therefore renewed efforts must be made to move God and his saints to mercy and forgiveness. Headed by the incense bearer and the musicians, a long procession trailed through the town and over the fields to the tombs. Three were visited in turn before we came to a *koûba* set in a grove

[3] Male dancer (religious).

[4] Golden drops.

of prickly pear, with a high bank running alongside. Here the musicians stopped, leaning against the whitewashed walls and pressing two tiny girls into their service, who, with the best possible imitation, reproduced the dance of the women. They were very pleased with themselves, fantastic little creatures; much praised too for their performance and when it was over we all trooped off once more to the racecourse.

Behind it, today, the hills were mountains of light and looked very far off, so that the armed horsemen, assembled in one long line stretching across the wide plain, seemed detached in a curious way from the landscape. Fronting towards the Grand Stand, side by side, stood two beautiful camels, proudly arching their sinuous necks, adorned near the head with wide bands of red velvet to match their trappings and the crimson cloths of the towering litters, in the strict seclusion of which the great ladies had travelled across the town.

All the male inhabitants were streaming in from every direction, or squatting in groups on the neighbouring hillslopes when the Fort clock, far away in the distance, struck four, and the Caïd with his small son rode on to the field. Last to arrive were the French officials, single file and at racing speed, followed by a blue winged cloud of Cavaliers du Makhzen; all that are left to us from a picturesque past.

The *fantasia* began. For a long time I sat watching the horsemen who, in pairs and in companies

galloped over the plain, firing salute after salute to a cloudless horizon: then I slipped away from an atmosphere, surcharged with emotion and from my balcony looked out at the West.

What an ominous sky, of a sudden, all streaked with tongues of angry orange red flame and — oh! how strange! — a great bank of black clouds gathering slowly, driven in by the wind towards the town.

At their advent the fantasia must have ceased: horsemen rode past up the hill; fragments of the crowd drifted by: with a jangling of bells the two great camels, manifestly conscious of their precious burdens, stepped slowly and carefully through the Square.

Still the inky mass was too high up, too far from earth: was passing . . . "O God! give us rain! The harvest withers! Send rain on that which Thou hast created!" The appeal had begun again; came now from the town; rose and fell; became a frantic persistent demand . . . has risen and fallen so for hours . . . "O God! give us rain . . . O God! give us rain! . . . Give us rain" . . .

. . . . . .

When evening comes it rains! Praise be to God.

CHAPTER XII

NAILIA

"La danse mauresque, dite danse du ventre, a . . . par certaines attitudes lentes, une signification de danse sacrée qui vient d'un Orient plus métaphysique." ISABELLE EBERHARDT.

"Sous les palmiers du café maure, les danses sacrées des Naïlet." VICTOR BARRUCAND.

"Oh, my beloved! Thou can'st eclipse all rivals by the charm of thy movements, by thy step proud and graceful as that of the katâ,[1] *and still more alluring."* ARAB SONG.

April 20th, 1913.

SEVENTY miles away from the Place of Happiness lies a little Arab town which has almost lost its individuality and has been swamped, so to speak, by the military camp which hems it in and has surrounded it with high stone walls and armoured gates.

There, even in April, the wind blows cold through its wide streets shaped like a cross, for it lies in the midst of the Saharien Atlas, that grand barrier of fissured gorges which divides Algeria from the desert: and though Djelfa is built in a depression, in the valley of the Oued Djelfa, it is little short of

[1] Desert partridge.

4,000 feet above sea level; is by no means unaccustomed to a fall of snow in winter, and sends on many an icy blast to the oases of the Hauts-Plateaux.

Although most uninteresting in itself, the village and its mosque outside the walls were a welcome sight to me when I caught my first glimpse of them, lit up by April's red moon, which had veritably taken on a rosy hue from an horizon whose tints announced the speedy coming of the sun. For the best part of seventeen hours, stopping only when we changed horses and to drink strong black coffee at intervals in isolated rest houses, I had been sitting on the box seat of a rough country cart beside a weird looking driver, blue clad even to the hood which enveloped his head, hugging a gun. Behind me, sheltered beneath a cover, were four Arabs and a Jew, all crouched up together and mindful of injunctions that no portion of my more roomy place should be encroached upon by any one of them.

At the end of the first stage of our journey our relations had been put on quite a friendly footing by my offer to pay for all those welcome little cups of coffee, which we drank in company, sitting by the wayside of a lovely pass amongst the mountains; and, in return, they were mindful of my comfort and even brought me hot cinders in a pan to warm my feet during the chill hours which precede the dawn. It was only at daybreak that they fell asleep, to my great joy, having wearied me out with a litany chanted by one or other of the four, to which the rest responded "Eh!" or "Aie!" at intervals;

and, if by chance there were a pause, the Jew at once seized the opportunity to loudly say his prayers, interrupting them by a yell of terror, when the driver unexpectedly fired off his gun to the huge delight of the Arabs, who were convulsed with laughter at his fear.

It may be that the devils had thus been kept at bay whilst we traversed the lonely steppe throughout the night watches, for there is nothing so effectual to keep off *djinns* as a continuous noise; but, personally, I should have been glad to take the risk. However, after four o clock, Nature asserted herself and my companions slept. The horses dozed also, and it was only by dint of waking the driver about every ten minutes to urge them on that we made any progress at all; but my energy was evidently mistaken; for he pulled up altogether, dismounted from his seat beside me and disappeared into a hut which stood a few paces off the road.

After some time when I, also drowsy with the delicious freshness of the air, must have been sound asleep, a voice shouting some sort of question in Arabic suddenly roused me from my slumbers and I called back in reply: —

"Can you speak French? *Do* find the driver for me: he's in that hut. I beg of you to go and hammer at the door."

To which appeal, a soldier on a bicycle responded with a cheery laugh, as he struck a match to light a cigarette and also to peer up at me:

"All right, Madam! he's probably asleep, but

you're not so very far away and only due at seven. When he comes out, he's sure to hurry up the horses and you'll arrive all in good time! "

In a moment he was gone, but our conversation had awakened my companions and they began to shout for the driver, who appeared presently with another man carrying a little tray with a long handle in the middle, round which were grouped some cups, and when I saw the hot coffee I quite forgot to scold, but took mine gratefully, and once more refreshed, we proceeded on our way. Not too quickly — that would be altogether against the customs of the country — for, by this time, we had come to pasture land where shepherds, guarding their flocks, and stray nomads hurried to meet us; to exchange greetings; ask for news and also, who was the *roumya* and whither was she bound?

Meanwhile the moon had paled to whiteness in the heavens and had disappeared before the stronger radiance of the sun and the larks were singing gaily as, punctually at seven, we drove into the gates of the little town which is one of the stages of the caravan route to the M'Zab.

The only other claim that Djelfa has to interest is as the capital, or more correctly, the headquarters of the Ouled Naïl; a great tribe, founded at the end of the 16th century by a famous saint, Sidi Naïl, who came from the Soûs. Over his descendants there still rests the mantle of his holiness and those in direct line from his son, Sidi Mâlik, are said to have the gift of miracles. It is, however, through their

women that the Ouled Naïl are notorious, for it has been the almost invariable custom of the tribe to send forth their daughters to the towns of the oases to follow, in all honour and in the odour of sanctity, the oldest profession for women, outside marriage, universally recognised by the world. There are, now-a-days, members of the tribe who, having been in close touch with Europeans, voluntarily declare that the dancers are drawn only from amongst the lowest, and cultured Mussulmen vehemently deny that religion enters into the question at all. Nakhla, whose one-eyed unattractive old mother hailed from Djelfa, assured me that the life led by the Ouled Naïl women was accounted to them for a shame; but when all has been said on the subject on both sides little doubt remains that the average Arabs hold some of them in high esteem and treat them with a respect they certainly would not accord to their own wives. Nor have they any objection to marrying the dancers magnificently adorned with a dowry of massive, barbaric trinkets which are the earnings of their earlier days.

They are richly attired in satin, or silk, or brocade of rose colour and pale blue, green and purple, or scarlet and gold, with long spangled veils, which depend from a diadem of blue and green enamelled silver, or a *sokhab* [2] brought low upon the forehead close to eyes rendered larger and more lustrous by the *koh'eul* which encircles them. Great earrings partly rest on glossy hair plaited over wool which

[2] Triple band of gold coins.

Kindly lent by Mrs. Mathews

Women of the Ouled Naïl

frames cheeks reddened with *khaloûk*[3] where are tiny tatooed signs and crosses, repeated also on the brow and below the carmine tinted lips. Necks and breasts are covered with jewelled chains: their arms, half bare, half veiled in wing like sleeves of gauze or lace, are laden with great bracelets studded with silver nails; and wide *khalkhal*[4] inlaid with cabochons, or coral, alluringly impede the progress of their steps. In all the towns of the oases they are constantly in evidence: no wedding or fête takes place without their presence or their aid and amongst my last recollections of the Place of Happiness is the dance given at night in the Market Square by the women of the Ouled Naïl.

. . . . . .

A cold night and dark, for the crescent moon, not yet many hours old, shyly vanishes for long intervals, her face discreetly veiled by drifting clouds which a chill breeze is chasing towards the south.

The Square lies in deep shadow, save for a large wide space where two great fires burn, throwing out jets of flame and showers of sparks that illumine the faces of the lads who feed them, lying luxuriously at their ease beside the welcome warmth. They form the basis of a triangle and at its apex is a group of men with flutes and tomtoms and a drum, squatting at one end of a long carpet which stretches out, between the burning wood, down to the feet of a dense expectant crowd.

[3] Khaloûk cosmetic.
[4] Anklets.

In the remote background, close against the railings of the gardens, brown *feloudji,*[5] raised on poles, form two awnings and the bright glare of acetylene falls fiercely on crouching figures enshrouded in dead white — wraiths driven in from the outer darkness, who have sunk in one long close line on rugs spread out upon the ground.

Behind them stand, between the tents, a little group of Cavaliers de Makhzen and surrounding the enclosure now — their draperies pale yellow in the firelight — is a serried throng,— banked up — of silent men. The Caïd's tall, portly form in bright red, ample robes moves to and fro across the empty space to little tables where are showy uniforms of scarlet and pale blue.

Servants appear with lighted candles which they set upon the earth in a long row before that wide white band of women, and hardly are they all in place and their pale glimmer flickering upward to meet the fiercer glare above, when the veils are suddenly discarded and there flashes into sight a quivering mass of brilliant, gleaming dragon flies, green, scarlet, blue and pink with a shimmer of silver on their glittering wings and their heads afire with the radiance of red gold.

The musicians, who have made the skins of their instruments taut by the heat of the fires, drown the faint rustle of silk and the chink, chink of bracelets and anklets, as two gorgeously dressed dancers pass over the row of footlights and advance down the cen-

[5] Tent coverings.

tre of that empty space, moving coquettishly, as does the desert *ganga*[6] to the rhythm of the measure set by *bnader* and flute.

Slowly, almost reluctantly, with outstretched arms; with nervous hands, full of vitality and power that invite and repulse, little by little they reach the crowd: then turn, where the flames leap towards their long spangled *lougas* changing them to unearthly hues of yellow and red rose.

It is always the same story they tell, these women, repeated again and again and again: of allurement, of appeal, of passion that flares, of repulse that but stirs it the more; of pursuit, of a yielding consent.

Suddenly the measure changes: is louder, quicker. Only one dancer stands there alone. She gleams like a glow worm: her form dark coloured and the sequins banding her head all aflame. Her feet in their jewelled fetters scarcely move forward: 'tis her body and arms are convulsed with the dance, and she waves a *mendil* slowly . . . slowly . . . winding it into tight folds in her hands, raising it with a backward gesture, making a bar of it, lowering it, loosening it, whirling it round before and behind her, till a wave of emotion surges over the watchers and the long line of women scream through their fingers . . . eoueeou . . . eoueeou . . . eoueeou . . . spurring her on.

So the night passes.

"As each scarce hour is hailed by the great clock" in the Fort above the gardens, that hitherto

[6] A sort of partridge.

impassive silent crowd of Arab men stirs . . . moves . . . speaks . . . calls aloud for Lalla Cheliha, for the wonderful dancer who toys with souls.

She alone still wears her *melh'afa,* which floats out behind her like great white wings and she keeps aloof from the dying embers in the shadows beyond the flames, which catch the gleam of her gold decked body beneath the transparency of her veil.

An evil spirit beckoning . . . posturing . . . doomed to dance when all's dark in the world.

She ceases and, with her, the music stops suddenly: the fires by now have quite died down. Some stray figures approach the dancers and, at each corner, break up their line. From thence comes the sound of harsh, mirthless laughter . . . but the rest of the crowd, like shades of dead Carmelite friars, drifts away silently into the gloom.

Last to leave are the ghostly women, directing their steps once more towards the town.

. . . . . .

"Facili decensus Avernus!" The clock strikes twelve.

PART II

IN THE M'ZAB

CHAPTER XIII

THE CARAVAN ROUTE TO THE M'ZAB

"The Beni-M'Zab, with their confederation of seven Towns . . . who count their palms by the hundred thousand and bring us their dates, the best in the world."

April, 1913.

PROPERLY speaking, the great caravan route to the M'Zab begins where the railway from Algiers comes to a finish for the time being; that is, at a dull French village lying in a valley, with hills all round and a dry hot looking bank of sand rising almost immediately at the back of its principal street.

Fortunately, for the sake of the landscape, behind that unpromising barrier and soaring above it, is a group of irregular mud houses which constitute the picturesque and real Boghari! Curious little Arab town! Not a straight line to be seen: everything and everybody on a slant, it might well be rechristened the *ksar* [1] of a hundred steps, for the ascent is more easily made by them, than by the track on the further side. At the base of the incline, they are hardly more than the indentations of countless

[1] Town village; headquarters of a tribe.

feet, naked and shod, which have passed that way; but they become much wider and broader, being evidently constructed by hand and graduated in the centre of the hilly street; finally, they narrow and grow steep at its very top.

In some of the shops, all on different levels, which edge the upper stairway on either side, their doorways, outlined with tiles adorned with arabesques, jewellers were at work fashioning trinkets for the daughters of Naïl installed in the *ksar.* In others again, piles of travelling boxes were being decorated with flowers painted in crude reds and blues: all the designs extremely conventional, for Arab art rarely wanders beyond the realms of geometry.

Elsewhere, and especially in a large square compartment, which helped to form a projecting corner on the hill, M'Zabites were seated on the ground with their wares lining the walls and heaped up beside them on the floor. They had beautiful carpets for sale and embroidered leather luxuries, for Boghari is a trading town of some importance: a mercantile halfway house between the fertile country, the flowery land, which lies around Algiers and Blida, and those desolate steppes, which must be traversed before it is possible to reach the strange unique cities of the South.

For centuries the Republic of the M'Zab enjoyed an almost splendid isolation; but lately enterprise has done much to bridge the gulfs of difficulty and distance; and what the motor car has begun, the aeroplane will no doubt shortly finish.

Photograph J. Geiser

The Oasis of Laghouat

Already, from Boghari to Djelfa and from Djelfa to Laghouat, the automobile-post has curtailed the journey by fifty hours: taking eight hours (broken by a night's rest) instead of fifty-eight in the archaic diligence, whose days are numbered even for the Arabs themselves.

After my long slow drive to Djelfa, the rapidity with which the next stage was accomplished — not to mention the comfort — made me fancy myself again in Europe; but when Laghouat was actually reached and we passed beneath the arches of its gates — oh! bewildering transitions of this most bewildering country! — had the *djinns* whirled me off to the Far East? to India? No, they had evidently transplanted an oriental town on to the south slope of the Sahara Atlas mountains and, to justify their freakishness, had made it, without and within the city walls, one of the most beautiful oases of the Little Desert.

Beyond the eastern gate and looking to the right, where the river flows through a wide plain which stretches into the sky, there comes to the mind an illusion of a vast sea beyond this mass of sand. Here the eye can reach to the horizon, but, to the northwest, a chain of hills partially shuts out the view. They stand apart at first, then join low down as if, with their greater strength of rock and stone they sought to shield the girdle of luxuriant palms; that verdant band, unclasped at either end, which holds within its midst a little town.

The gardens are themselves shut in by great mud

walls, with high patches added here and there, so jealous are their owners of their beauties and fearful to display them. Their doors are frequently so low that one must bend and crouch to enter, if by lucky chance they open from within, or stand ajar.

It is a deserted region, the maze of tiny paths which intersect and separate this wealth of greenery, where the passer-by misses his way, time and again, gazing up at the marvellous growth which o'ertops the envious brown walls. Great tufted crests tower defiantly above them and even fall upon the barriers, breaking them by a great length of trunk, to be promptly shorn of its graceful plumes. The fig trees, more pliable and gentle, bend over gracefully and fling a welcome shade athwart the sunny lanes; whilst apricots, as yet unripe, and the vivid scarlet blossoms of the pomegranate hang temptingly, low down on the forbidden side.

At last there opens out a wider space with houses, which, not long since, have obviously seen much better days; but now, in front of them, there is a busy scene, a washing ground, filled with dark skinned negresses, heavy eyed, strong, wringing out garments from the water of a little network of canals. Behind them rises a great rock, with barracks crowning it, but the bareness of the tawny coloured stone is softened by high acacias, which line its base. Though the seed has already formed and hangs in golden drops, the trees are still in blossom: their flowers show a touch of purple in each heart, but

the petals are fading quickly from pale mauve into a shadowy transparent white.

The walls close up again quite suddenly and mysterious figures flit along the narrow paths, for close by lies the congested native quarter of the town: also a maze of lanes, but with low huts on either side and little shops and children playing in the dust, making toy pots and dishes out of mud.

Here live the descendants of the ungrateful sons of Laghouat who were lucky enough to escape the awful judgment prophesied by their saintly founder. They had importuned him to help them against the inhabitants of El-Afisa, who continually harassed them, and they promised the *M'rabet* a large sum of money if their enemies could be destroyed through his intervention with "Him Who has power." [2]

At length Sidi El-Hadj-Aïssa yielded to their solicitations and in answer to his prayers, "He Who commands" [2] sent a fearful tempest, which raged over the neighbouring *ksar*. Hailstones fell, as large as pigeons' eggs, beating on the houses and wrecking the gardens. Date palms were hurled to the ground: flocks of sheep and goats, dispersed over the country, perished. When the storm lifted the whole town was in ruins, full of dead men, women and children stifled by the clouds of dust and sand which had enveloped them.

The Beni-Laghouat were now safe from further attack, but directly they were in the enjoyment of

[2] One of the ninety-nine names of Allah.

their full measure of security, they forgot their obligations to El-Hadj Aïssa, and entirely neglected to fulfill their share of the contract.

The saint had ever loved and treated them as his own children: had never failed them when danger came nigh the ksar: had lavished his advice and help upon them: had prayed for them to "Him Who giveth all." [2]

Now their falseness, their greed and their ingratitude roused within him an immeasurable wrath and scorn, so that he cursed the people of Laghouat and their beautiful city and prophesied its fall.

Many years were to roll by before that terrible punishment was accomplished: before the French came to place their cannon within the shadow of the koûba, where the dead saint had been laid to rest, on an eminence which commands the Arab town: but time is as nought for the things that are already written and in the hour of his bitterness and sorrow the gift of vision was granted to El-Hadj-Aïssa: he foresaw the triumph of the Christian and the downfall of the Turk.

. . . . . .

The women of Laghouat have mostly chosen to enshroud themselves in *melah'af* of a sombre shade of blue, such as the Old Masters loved to paint; and when their draperies fall apart, showing white round brow and throat, seen from afar their wearers might very well belong to some new order of the Little Sis-

[2] One of the ninety-nine names of Allah.

ters of the Poor. What made them choose that shade above all others? passed often through my mind, until the sky gave me my answer one Sabbath afternoon, as I stood by the doorway of the Mosque, listening to the continuous murmuring chant of men; an unbroken drowsy hum borne towards me from within. Here a crescent tops the single minaret, but not a hundred yards away rise two towers, with a cross between, of that other sanctuary where women, clad in snowy robes,[3] their heads covered with fine linen, sing praises to the glory of their God.

Apart from prayer and praise no sound disturbed the stillness. The little town beneath the palm trees' shade seemed wrapped in a sweet dream of gladness and of peace. The air was fragrant with the warm heavy scent of roses from the villa gardens behind silver painted gates, in the long avenue to the southwest outside the walls.

How fascinating it was and how loth I felt to go, but each successive day was just a little hotter than the last and my goal lay a hundred and thirty miles nearer to the great Desert, the throne of the Sun.

It behoved me, therefore, to send my letter of introduction to the Commandant and to enquire if he would permit me to travel to Ghardaïa all on my own wild lone, as I was not timid and quite prepared to do so. Whereupon he called upon me and most politely and decidedly said "No!" He would, however, send me an orderly of the Bureau Arabe,

[3] Sœurs Blanches.

to accompany me, and arrange for a place to be reserved in the coupé of the diligence for myself, and one on the roof for my cavalier on any day I chose to start.

On the following afternoon, at four o'clock, Kaha and I left Laghouat.

The body of a Sahara diligence is divided into two compartments: that in front can accommodate three very small and very short people; into the one behind and on the roof Arabs and M'Zabites are packed like sardines in a barrel; and on my return journey there were sixteen of them including my cavalier and the driver, as well as merchandize and baggage!

My French fellow passenger in the coupé was armed to the teeth, not knowing " what might arrive " as he carefully explained, setting up a gun in the corner and placing a revolver on the ledge in front of him. No doubt it is always well to be ready for any emergency. It sometimes wards off danger, and all sorts of alarming stories are afloat about murdered M'Zabites, attacks on commercial travellers and what not: but I may as well say at once that during all that long journey of forty hours through a desolate country, we had no unpleasant experiences whatever, beyond the awful jolting on the rough Sahara road which, at times, is little better than a stony track. As most of life's difficulties and discomforts have their attendant compensations, what, after all, is a shaking compared to seeing the glory of the dawn when it breaks and illumines those vast steppes,

Kindly lent by Mrs. Mathews

The Diligence crossing the Steppe to Ghardaïa

where sound is not? "In those arid wastes, that land of bare rock, there is something which lives and has being: it is the hours. Every dawn and twilight is a drama." When they approached, those exquisite hours, the diligence would stop and all the Mussulmen, Arabs and M'Zabites, descend and scatter themselves at little intervals, over the adjoining landscape, to pray. Birds of passage in a land without water, they used the dry earth for their ablutions and extending their open palms beyond their knees, prostrated themselves gently and humbly till their foreheads touched the dust. It is, above all, the prayer of *fedjer*[4] that is acceptable to Allah. In the towns and cities of the Mussulman world, about an hour before it is possible to discern a white thread from a black one, a cry of warning breaks through the stillness and darkness of the night. "It is better to pray," call the *Muezzins*[5] from the minarets: "It is better to pray than to sleep!" and the faithful are ready to welcome with their prayers the first announcement of the splendid coming of the sun. He was flooding all the land with his glory when at eight o'clock we drove into the enclosure of the famous caravanserai of Tilrempt.

Famous, that is to say, amongst travellers in the M'Zab who have enjoyed its hospitality and its wonderful varied menu and cooking of seven courses, hundreds of miles away in the interior. Praises are heaped on the jolly, genial host and cook combined,

[4] Prayer at dawn.
[5] Criers.

who is obviously as delighted with them as a child that has planned and carried through a great surprise. They have to be recorded in a book kept expressly for the purpose and many of his guests have even burst forth into rhyme!

The six hours for refreshment and repose passed all too quickly in that little oasis with its park of terebinths, which have been so aptly called "the providential trees of a country without shade," for their thickly covered boughs branch out all round making great green parasols, which give a welcome shelter upon every side.

At two o'clock we left these joys behind us and were again en route: a more dreadful journey even than that of the preceding afternoon and night. The men walked for long intervals at a stretch, perhaps partly preferring a promenade to their cramped quarters in the diligence, but also to save the horses who could just drag the vehicle and me over the stony, hilly track; powerful, well-cared-for beasts though they were and would need to be.

Matters mended somewhat after midnight as we were approaching Berrian; the first of the seven confederated towns of the M'Zab, built in the 17th century on a chalky limestone plateau. When we arrived only the frogs were awake, chanting a glad and noisy song, but the café maure soon opened its doors and Kaha brought out a bench for me to sit upon, covering it with his *burnous*. He treated me throughout the journey and during my visit like a precious parcel delivered into his keeping by his

Commandant, though I fear occasionally he found me an anxious charge.

When it was daylight again, from my little window I looked over a more weird and impossible country than ever. Not a living thing: not a green leaf. It might have been a battle ground for demons and giants in some prehistoric age, who fought each other with stones and huge masses of rock, hurling them from engines of war not yet known to man. To my idea, the approaches to Ghardaïa are so strange as to be terrifying. Some such scene as this Doré saw, or imagined, when he painted his "Entrée à l'Inferno:" a land from which God had hidden His face. Though the awful jolting had ceased and we found ourselves once more on a well constructed road, with a wall between us and the abyss, its circular windings seemed to sustain, rather than remove the first impressions of that steep descent. Certainly, it was beyond all possibility of belief that we were within easy reach of a Promised Land; of a beautiful oasis with its great green forest of nearly two hundred thousand palms!

CHAPTER XIV

THE ELECT OF ALLAH

"Praise be to God Who has taught us when we were ignorant and Who, from amongst His many creatures, chose us as His elect."

DOGMA OF THE PEOPLE OF GHARDAÏA.

"In this world it is not possible to be generous with a small fortune and the only real fortune obtainable is that gained in commerce."

ABOU YAKOUB YOUCEF BEN BRAHIM BEN MENNAD.

May, 1913.

MY first day at Ghardaïa was spent in bed. We had hardly arrived when Kaha, as fresh as paint, worried me persistently for my letter of introduction to the Commandant, until I told him that nothing in this world would make me write a letter until six o'clock that evening. In the meantime he could report himself; notify our arrival; in short, do anything and everything he pleased, provided he left me alone. The welcome sound of his retreating footsteps along the balcony followed this announcement and I heard no more of him until the evening; when my note and its enclosure brought a prompt and kind offer to place another Cavalier of the Bureau at my disposal, as guide, who

Kindly lent by Mrs. Mathews

El-Ateuf

had been a resident of the M'Zab from boyhood and knew this group of cities well.

Of the seven confederated towns, Berrian and Guerrara are far away to the north and northeast; but five of them lie within a few kilomètres of each other, enclosed by a belt of rocks, with openings at either end for the passage of the river on which depends their lives. Furthest from Ghardaïa, beside an elbow of the *oued,*[1] where it turns southward, El-Ateuf was founded nine centuries ago. It is the oldest of these sister cities and Bou-Noura is the prettiest, having the appearance of a mediæval town hemmed in by palms. It is, unfortunately, tucked away, out of sight, round a corner of projecting rocks and cannot be seen even from the lofty watch tower of the sacred city which lies on the right bank of the river. The inhabitants of Beni-Isguen have built their town up the side of the mountain, shutting in their holiness and vast wealth with immense crenelated walls of stone, outside an earlier enclosure, of which some parts remain. Mélika, constructed entirely on the crown of the oposite hill, has lost the title to chief sanctity, which it once enjoyed, when it guarded the treasure of the whole Confederation in the great cellars beneath its Mosque. Now its interests are bound up with those of the largest city, Ghardaïa, not a mile away, its houses massed closely together; a series of arcades and terraces, shaded from white to brown, rising tier upon tier as in an amphitheatre, till they touch the base of a

[1] River.

broken pyramid, which stands alone on the very summit and dominates the town.

When high market is held here on Fridays, the main road, running right through the valley, which connects these five hill cities, presents a curious and amusing spectacle. Hundreds of the inhabitants from each — men only, be it understood — pour along it in a continuous stream. Many, of course, are on foot, but the wealthy merchants get astride tiny *bourriquots,* which are almost hidden from view by the portly persons of their owners, bundled up in clothes. Four little thin brown legs trot along unsteadily, with a great foot thrust out on either side close to the ground, and presumably arrive at their destinations, though this would appear sometimes an impossible feat even for an Algerian donkey.

The M'Zabite has a type all his own, as characteristic and recognisable as that of the Jew. Though originally of Berber descent, he resembles neither the Kabyle of the north, the Arab of the Hauts-Plateaux, nor indeed any of the other dwellers in North Africa. Short and stout, with a round fat face, thick nose, wide and coarse mouth, he is by no means a beauty. His complexion too is pale with the unwholesome tinge induced by a sedentary life: moreover he is untidy and seems to pay no heed to his appearance or attire.

Kaha, tall and muscular, with his finely cut features, carefully trimmed beard and his air of a dandy, whose socks are chosen to the exact match of the cords which confine his turban, was a great and

pleasing contrast to this crowd; and Lackdor too, in a dark blue *burnous* edged with red flung jauntily over one shoulder.

Feeling extremely well guarded and secure between the two of them, I also went to market; through narrow, crowded, hilly streets, till we arrived at a large open square thronged with men, mules, camels, donkeys and merchandize all mixed up together in a seething inextricable mass and hardly elbow room anywhere. We managed to struggle through as far as the *Caïd's* office and after I had been presented, he allowed me to go upstairs to a large room, where doubtless many weighty affairs are settled; and from its windows I was able to survey this concourse of men and beasts, whilst Kaha admired himself in the looking glass on the wall behind me.

When our entertainments palled, we sallied forth again to climb more streets and passages so narrow, that I had to close my sunshade to pass through; growing steeper and steeper till we reached the sanctuary, which crowns the height, the doors of which were inexorably closed to me. Just without the precincts was one of the surprising wells, which, at the very top of these high rocks of the M'Zab, are sunk into the earth, 150 feet perhaps; and anxiously watched from this month onward through the tropical summer, for, if the water fail — ah! what misery that means! Within a stone's throw was the chamber, where the faithful perform their ablutions before prayer, with dozens of jars waiting to be

filled from the well without. Then we wandered round some passages to the foot of the strange minaret the M'Zabites erect above their mosques wherever they may build them. The winding steps were very worn by the frequent passage of the criers who, from the darkness which precedes morning till night falls again, ascend and descend that broken stairway to make known the hours of prayer and announce the greatness of the one and only God.

It is a long climb to the very top and a strange vista looking down on Ghardaïa; a town of eight thousand souls and yet not one of them visible on the innumerable terraces; and its streets concealed by a mass of masonry: it might be a city of the dead. Facing it lie vast burial grounds for the strangers that die within its gates; across to the left rises the sacred city clasped in a girdle of stone; alongside, Mélika with a steep ascent before its first dwelling can be reached. Three unique cities, unlike, and yet more or less facsimiles of each other: an agglomeration of houses, arcades, terraces, wells, mosque, pyramid and M'Zabites: over all a burning sun.

His fierce rays, concentrated on all this rock and stone, reflect their heat; wrap the three cities in a sheet of flame; make white terraces dazzling with their brightness; deepen the shades of yellow, turning them to gold; play about the little pink washed koûba in the valley, till its walls are tinted rose.

It is dedicated to Abd-el-Kadr, the saint pre-eminent of Islam, the jolliest *ouali* [2] in Paradise, with a

[2] Saint.

turn for practical joking, even after his admission to that abode of bliss. Rumours, which had spread beyond the limits of this world and reached his ears, of the fame of another *m'rabet* and of a *zaouïa* he had established, aroused the dead saint's curiosity. Anxious to assure himself of the validity of these claims to greatness, he borrowed his soul and enclosed it in the body of a poor scholar. Thus disguised, Abd-el-Kadr presented himself at the College founded by Abd-el-Aziz and with some difficulty, for by reason of its celebrity it was very full, he gained admission. The better to act his part and not arouse the slightest suspicion of his real identity, the saint played endless pranks on the unfortunate master, making the poor man's life a perfect burden to him. Day after day this went on, until at last matters came to a climax when the unruly scholar was told to prepare the evening meal for the whole College: a duty each one took in turn. Abd-el-Kadr flatly refused; but though the master was very angry at his rudeness, he fully expected his order would be obeyed. However, when he found at the last moment that nothing was ready; not even a fire, or wood, beneath the three stones on the hearth, for the first time he lost all self control and began to beat the saint. The latter at once put his right leg under the big pot and set it alight with a lamp as if it were a log. Hey! presto! supper was ready: the most delicious *couscousou* that ever was cooked. Naturally the whole College immediately realised that this was a great personage they had unknowingly harboured in their midst.

Everybody was quite overcome. Abd-el-Aziz apologised humbly for his master: the latter grovelled on his own account and escaped with a reproof. Much tried man! How relieved he must have been when his wonder working, saint scholar took his departure once more to the realms of the blest!

After inspecting the inside of the little *koûba,* which had the flag of Islam and some cretonne on the walls by way of decoration, Lackdor invited me to coffee at his home, which lay just across the road in the foreign quarter of the town. Kaha was only allowed to accompany us to within a hundred yards of the house and the younger man, but lately married, took good care to see him safely seated on a stone projection by the roadside, before he went ahead to knock at his own door with the warning cry of *"Roumya!"*

After the sordid poverty-stricken dwellings I had visited in the Place of Happiness, this was a miniature palace; but as comfort and prosperity by no means always bring contentment in their wake, Lackdor was avowedly dissatisfied with his lot in life and had America in his mind's eye as a possible Eldorado. His father, a delightful refined-looking old Arab, had in his time travelled all over the south of Algiers and Constantine and northwards to Lyons, so perhaps there is a nomadic strain in the family; though the son more nearly resembles his stout, dark eyed mother, who was seated in state, on a chair, dressed in a negligé she called a *roba.* She and her daughter-in-law, like the other women in the M'Zab,

whose combined earnings have been estimated at £28,000 a year, were industrious workers and contributed their share towards the maintenance of the home. She showed me a *burnous,* just completed, of a pretty brown shade rather affected by the M'Zabites, which had been daintily finished with stitching in pale pink silk and was priced at sixty francs.

Lackdor's pretty, gentle, young wife half knelt, half sat on the ground beside the great frame on which the first strands of a *bidi*[3] were being stretched by herself and another woman. She smiled a little timidly now and again at her somewhat unamiable lord, who ignored her after pointing her out to me by way of introduction.

Whilst the little negress servant prepared the coffee, we inspected the chickens and goats which, in this household, did not live with the family, but in a tidy yard wired in to prevent them from wandering into the adjoining sitting hall. Round the latter ran a gallery off which were sleeping quarters. Above again, the usual terrace with a view of the mountains to the north; the road to Laghouat; and, in the immediate foreground, Kaha's picturesque blue clad figure patiently awaiting our return.

When we joined him the sun was setting. Mountain and valley and sky were suffused with a soft luminous glow. The air was close and hot: even on a little plateau above the valley of the shadow of death, the graveyards of Jews and Arabs facing

[3] A very fine burnous.

Ghardaïa, there seemed not a breath. In each brown pyramid above the cities appeared simultaneously the white figure of a crier. The appeal, which always seems so strangely pathetic, barely reached our ears, but as it ended and the muezzins vanished my two cavaliers bowed themselves in prayer. Kaha never failed in his religious duties and was so orthodox a follower of the Prophet that nothing would persuade him to find me a sorceress or a magician: someone, for example, who would bring the moon down into a *sahfa,* which terrifying spectacle I am so anxious to witness. Every time the subject was broached, he would look very grave, shake his head slowly and say: "It is forbidden. Why do you wish to see it? To learn to do it yourself?"

Lackdor was not hampered by these scruples, but unfortunately the only lunar witch lived twenty miles away and there were difficulties about reaching her abode in the middle of the night: also, some doubts had been thrown on her ability to work this wonder. Finally, I had to content myself with a séance at the dwelling of a negress in the town itself, accompanied by Lackdor only. Kaha begged to be excused: he wished to purchase a hat as the sun was exceedingly powerful: much hotter than at Laghouat.

One morning, therefore, I found myself somewhere in the poorest precincts of Ghardaïa, outside a low wooden door which Lackdor tried in vain to open. At last he gave up the attempt, knocked with a stone and called out loudly, "Masouda, Masouda!"

Presently there appeared at the entrance a tall rather bent old negress, as nearly approaching a monkey in looks as ever human being could. We followed her down a narrow passage to a space at the end open to the sky, with the sunlight playing on the further wall and reaching out towards a corner where another negress crouched in shadow, surrounded by a semi-circle of big balls of brown wet mud. Near her, in the uneven ground, was a pool of very dirty water and beside it a brazier with live coal, on which rested a long handled spoon containing molten lead. Everything had been prepared for our arrival and I seated myself on a flight of steps with Lackdor at my feet, telling him to ask the negress what would happen to him in the future.

From a little niche in the wall of this weird abode she took a piece of mutton fat and dividing it into five, put the little bits on to the spoon and set a light to them. The other negress gave her five seeds (coriander perhaps?) out of a piece of red rag and these also were dropped into the flame. Muttering some sort of incantation to herself, the witch held the spoon over the brazier: then, plunged it into the pool of water, eagerly watching the lead as, hissing like a living thing, it spread itself out, curled up, bent over, stiffened and was still.

What passed was quite unintelligible to me, but judging from Lackdor's expression and such portions as he translated, most satisfactory. For the sake of his household, of which assuredly he is the pivot, I hope that the hands of the little son, that is

to be born, will be strong enough to hold him in the M'Zab and prevent his thoughts and himself from straying into the far away Western World.

Amongst other visions, the negress had said she saw Lackdor conducting me through the largest M'Zabite cemeteries, so we decided to fulfil the prophecy forthwith and, on our way, picked up Kaha at the shop, where he was still engaged in purchasing his hat. It was a wonderful affair: very high, of cream coloured straw with a diagonal pattern in red ascending both sides to the crown, and the brim lined with three cornered pieces of red and green stuff sewn together with gold thread. Tilted at a fascinating angle, it made him look so rakish as to be almost unrecognisable. Really I felt relieved that, despite the intensity of the sun's rays, he generally elected to carry it, attached by a leather strap, in the middle of his back where it was a great ornament and he, his usual staid and solemn self. The bargaining had been a long and arduous affair for the M'Zabites know their business well and, with all their reputation for probity, they have a strong commercial instinct inherited for generations. They are very active and laborious, and even in byegone days when the religious persecutions of the Arabs gave them no safe outlets northward for their trade, they managed to penetrate nevertheless to Tunis and to the Tell: southward they went to the Soudan and trafficked in slaves.

In 1853 the French entered into a treaty with the dwellers in the M'Zab and for nearly thirty years

the seven cities were merely a Protectorate of France; but greatly as these merchants of the south valued their independence, continual strife of parties was bringing ruin and they welcomed the security to their persons and goods afforded by a foreign administration. Under it they have acquired the monopoly of trade, it may be said, all over Algeria. Few towns know them not as shopkeepers; but wherever they may be, as soon as they have amassed a little fortune, back they come with their gains, to spend their last days amongst their co-religionists and be buried in the M'Zab.

"There are more dead than living at Ghardaïa" has passed into a saying, the truth of which is fully attested by the immense number of graves in the many burial grounds, which surround the base of the town. Each sect has its own cemetery: in one are buried the descendants of the very earliest inhabitants: in another are the *nazils,* those who joined the Confederation at a later date. Elsewhere are dissentients on this, or that, point of dogma, but whatever may be the differences, religious or otherwise of the living, these are hardly apparent in the disposition of the dead. Only the Jews in the valley are shut in by tombstones with names and dates inscribed. The rich M'Zabites lie beneath fragments and whole jars of pottery that are green, the colour of the verdure which these cities lack. Sometimes a pretty glass cup is sacred to the use and memory of the dead, who drank from it before he passed over to the other shore; but mostly the heaps of

brown earth are bare, rising up the hill, tier upon tier, as do the houses of this amphitheatre.

In old days the *tolbas* [4] took care to erect in each graveyard a large platform of stone masonry to which the faithful brought donations in kind — great sacks of dates, of figs; jars of butter, of water for the Mosques and for the clergy. Now, my guides told me, they are used for prayer.

In the large cemetery dedicated to Ammi-Said-ben-Ali beneath an overhanging projection of rock close to a *djemmâ,* Lackdor pointed out a curious collection of small knotted bundles containing hair, placed there, so he said, by expectant mothers. If he were entirely correct, the sacrifice was made to ensure health and ward off evil and misfortune of any kind soever. It is quite as likely, however, that some at least were offerings after illness as a means of purification; for it is held that the malady which remains in the hair is absorbed by the sacred force of the dead if the hair is cut and placed by a grave. Even in health it is desirable to either bury it, as well as nail parings, or put them in some spot so sacred that no enemy will dare to carry them away; for everything that has touched a body partakes of its personality and cut hair and nails remain always in sympathy with the individual and might be juggled with by sorcerers to the awful detriment of their former possessor.

As a variant of these customs, the Jewish women of the M'Zab save their hair combings and making

[4] Clergy.

up a little packet throw it into a rivulet, believing that the contact of the dead strands with the fresh living waters will preserve for them their woman's crown of glory.

From the graveyards we walked on to the bed of the river: an immense wide stretch of golden sand, with a clump of wells in the foreground and the crests of feathery branches showing clear against the sky. The river should flow in autumn and mid-winter: whether it does, or does not, decides the fortunes and the happiness of the M'Zab for a whole year. Not a drop of that precious liquid is allowed to be lost: the current is diverted into innumerable canals and water-courses. A large portion of the population spend all their lives in watering the gardens: in superintending and leading the camels, the mules and the donkeys which raise great skins out of the wells. Their contents bring life to the fruit trees: the figs, apricots and pomegranates; to the vine which spreads from palm to palm; to the beans and the pumpkins, lastly to the forests of date palms, all and ever athirst beneath the scorching rays of an eternal sun.

This was my last, my most beautiful vision of Ghardaïa.

CHAPTER XV

THE INTERPRETER

"Mahomet said, 'I suggest, I command you to cherish your wives . . . for they are your captives, your prisoners.'"

"For thousands of years the devil and man have combined against Eve." PERRON.

"Mr. Asquith for the first time opposed the franchise for women explicitly on the ground that woman is not the female of the human species, but a distinct and inferior species naturally disqualified from voting as a rabbit is disqualified from voting. This is a very common opinion."

G. BERNARD SHAW.

May 6th, 1913.

THE sirocco yesterday afternoon temporarily put a stop to my sight seeing. Every crevice in the little hotel had to be closed up and we were nearly all asphyxiated in consequence. The hot wind swept over the valley. A veritable tornado, it brought semi-darkness with it for clouds of dust filled the air; obliterated the sun; beat against the windows in a fury to make entrance. Such a tempest as this it must have been that Allah sent in answer to the prayers of El-Hadj-Aïssa, when he

Kindly lent by Mrs. Mathews

A M'Zabite Mosque

killed off the enemies of the Beni-Laghouat; only we, fortunately who had not incurred any saint's wrath, were spared hailstones, so have survived to tell the story.

When the violence of the storm had abated a little, I gingerly opened one window for a breath of air, of whatsoever quality it might be, and looked out. Nothing to be seen but a thick curtain of dust rolling away, further from us, up higher, enveloping the next town and Mélika was shut off completely as by a drop scene in the middle of a drama.

By night, happily, all was normal, for it is not one of the least joys of this country that nothing in the way of weather, except perhaps drought, lasts long. However trying to-day may be, there is always reasonable hope that all will be well to-morrow: if not, certain sure the day after. At all events, on this occasion, by evening the dreadful pall which had been above us sank gradually to earth in millions of fragments, until such time as the hot wind from the South should again whip them up together and drive them en masse before it in its mad tempestuous rage.

My visit to our neighbours of Mélika, therefore, was only postponed for a few hours and next morning accompanied by my two cavaliers I climbed the stone paved winding ascent which leads to the top of the next hill.

Imagine a mountain like a loaf of French bread in half with the end in the air; then cut off the first round with all its knobs! Thus might Mélika be

removed at one fell stroke, so compactly is it built on the very crown of the hill, with the Mosque occupying the principal excrescence and a beautiful date palm, the pride of the town, growing close against its walls. Opposite was the well, said to be the deepest in the M'Zab, and at the corner the Caïd had his office. This functionary, who acts as an intermediary for the Arabs in their dealings with the Bureau Arabe and as the representative of his particular town in every case, had met us in the market place for word had been sent to him that a *roumya* visitor was coming. He was accompanied by his Interpreter and right-hand man: his mouthpiece with others probably besides foreigners for he seemed by far the most forceful and important person of the two. Ishak Sedd el-Kedim was a wealthy trader with shops in Algiers and in the M'Zab and it was to his house I was taken — not the Caïd's — for the never failing hospitality to strangers. He was taller than most of his race and had more presence, but in other respects an unmistakable M'Zabite. He spoke French fluently, German a little; English, more wonderfully than intelligibly, for he had been trying to teach himself by reading and pronounced the words with a strong Arabic guttural exactly as they were spelt — a method not to be recommended with our beautiful but somewhat exasperating language. In Algiers, naturally, he had come into contact with strangers from all parts of the world; was well informed about many countries of Europe in other respects than commercially and told me that

England, which he longed to see, must be like a beautiful garden.

We sat — on chairs — round a table in a long low otherwise unfurnished room, and fresh milk was brought in with a large dish of dates, "the best in the world," it is said. To my uneducated taste they seemed rather dry and the Caïd, who sat on my left, paid me the compliment of handing them to me with his very dirty fingers. Consequently, my progress in consuming them was so slow that the Interpreter, who was facing me at the table, remarked upon it and I was obliged to excuse myself by saying that I had only just breakfasted and was not hungry. Cups of strong café maure followed this first course and were succeeded by equally strong cups of tea made in English fashion. After this odd mixture of drinks, which made me feel rather ill, we went for a walk through the town, where there was not much to see except the view, beautiful on all sides with the oasis stretching away into the far distance, much further than eye could reach, and the golden glory that enveloped this mountain of light.

The most curious and, to me, most pitiful part of that promenade, was the attitude of the poor little women we came across from time to time. They were all rolled up from top to toe in cream coloured *melh'afa,* which looked rather like sacks. Had there only been long upstanding loops near the head, their resemblance to rabbits would have been complete, especially as their movements were hampered by the folds of their long draperies which, presum-

ably they dared not lift up from around their feet, even in their haste to hop away. It must be remembered that I was accompanied by four of those wonderful beings whom the Koran says God elevated above women by reason of the superior qualities with which he had endowed them. Their passage through the streets seemed to awaken terror in the breast of every female we met, so stringent are social laws in the M'Zab. It is forbidden for women to mix with men in the public squares, or at weddings. Their attendance at a Mosque is not recommended, but discouraged, and should they go, they must keep right at the back and be unscented, lest they distract the attention of the faithful from their prayers by their presence and their perfume. For a man to touch a woman's hand, voluntarily, or even accidentally, amongst these Berber Puritans, is considered a grievous sin. The market places women may not even enter, so fearful are the "superior sex" of falling victims to their dreaded fascinations, for these poor timid bunnies are held to be "the depository of dangerous magical forces"! Superstitious fear of this nature engenders spiteful dislike which, together with an immense contempt for women, has been fostered by Arab literature. Writers agree in asserting that all the great sages and all the great prophets have looked upon woman as a force solely for evil and the following tradition is illustrative of the general tone and feeling shewn in religious works.

One day Jesus, the Son of Mary, met Iblis (the

Devil) driving before him four heavily laden donkeys.

"What are you about?" said Jesus to Iblis.

"I have merchandize for sale and am conveying it to my most likely customers."

"What have you there, in your first bale?"

"Hardness: mercilessness."

"Who buys that?"

"Kings."

"And in the second of your bales?"

"Those contain jealousy."

"Who buys it?"

"Savants."

"The third bale, what is in that?"

"Deception."

"To whom do you sell it?"

"Merchants."

"But in that fourth bale, what have you there?"

"Cunning."

"And who buys that?"

"That is bought by women."

Jesus went forth, cursing the works and trade of the devil.

The followers of the Prophet, to their everlasting shame be it spoken, have done everything possible to humiliate and debase womanhood. The women themselves, being kept in a complete state of mental ignorance, are voiceless and defenceless against all attack. In the M'Zab they are not allowed to leave the cities of the Confederation on any pretext whatever, not even to follow their husbands

who would be declared heretic and outcast if their wives accompanied them to the towns where they trade. Women born at Beni-Isguen never pass beyond that encircling band of stone: cannot marry in any other city, even of the M'Zab itself: within it they spend all the days of their lives until they die. Prisoners and captives they are in very deed and truth; sold when yet children, perhaps under eight years of age, to men who have them entirely at their mercy and who, according to an Arab proverb, "beat well when they love well."

However, even here the tide is just on the turn and in many places, including Ghardaïa, efforts are being made by the Europeans to ameliorate the lot of the women and to raise them, little by little, from the degraded condition in which they have been kept for so many centuries by their highly superior lords, who forbade them the rites and consolations of religion and who closed, as they hoped finally, the approaches to knowledge, that they might render the mothers of their children almost mindless and kill out, by material desire, the better dictates of the soul.

The custom of veiling, however, cannot be laid to the charge of the Moslems. It probably had its origin in the awful dread of the evil eye which haunts primitive races and dates back to almost prehistoric times. In those far distant days, young people of both sexes covered their faces, when in public, lest they should attract the envious glances of a *ma'iân,* always directed against beauty and youth,

with often such terrible results! Add to this fear the Mussulman's dread of the fascinations of Eve, of the magic, electrical currents supposed to emanate from the gentler sex, against which the *melh'afa* afforded him some protection, and it is, after all, not so very surprising that it became "a duty, a virtue . . . to hide all women. They were brought up in the belief that for a stranger to behold the face of a woman is almost an outrage."

In my present surroundings there was no room for doubt that this social tradition held all the poor little rabbits fast in its grip. Faffa and Nanna, Betti, Chacha and Hanna, as they are most appropriately named, darted into doorways; hid and crouched in any available nook, or angle; hopped nervously round corners, or pressed themselves against some house, their veiled faces close to the wall, their backs to us, who all passed on paying no heed to them whatever. As well as curiously pathetic, it was also very comical and I could not forbear making some comment on these ridiculous antics to Sedd-El-Kedim, who remarked with a solemn and severe countenance:—"Of course they hide themselves: they are ashamed!"

We finished our walk at the schools, of which the Interpreter appeared to be immensely proud, but I understand that, usually, if a M'Zabite can keep his boy out of a French school, he does so and will even pay for a proxy, should the authorities bring a little pressure to bear. In this out-of-the-way corner of the world, the tuition was as up-to-date and modern

as in any European town, carried on by Arab masters under a French Director. All the children enjoyed the same advantages, irrespective of race or creed.

"This is splendid for the future of your men," I said to him, "and what are you doing for the women?"—"*Nothing!*" he responded shortly, "*and never will.* Our women must stay here. If they were taught to read, they would want to go away. Look at you, how you go about all over the world. We would never permit such a thing." I maintained a discreet silence but turned away to hide an involuntary smile! How often that idea had been expressed in every language, and in all lands had proved equally futile in the face of that inevitable law of evolution, which no man can arrest. The thin end of the wedge has been driven in even at Ghardaïa by the Soeurs Blanches beneath the Interpreter's own eyes. The work of civilisation begun by the Schools for Industries is being carried on still more rapidly by classes for reading and writing even in such a hotbed of fanaticism as Constantine. True, the fathers object and say they "do not wish their daughters to become interpreters," but their grumbles are unheeded, wherever and whenever possible, whilst at Bône, amongst the Kabyles, the Schools must be enlarged, so great, and increasing, is the number of entries. Therefore, despite the dictum of the Interpreter there is hope for the Arab women of a better future, and for all the world that

the hideous dead level and degradation to mankind of rabbit hutch traditions will, ere long, be relegated to the dust heap of other worn out creeds, injustices and superstitions.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SACRED CITY OF THE ABADIA

" The name of this sect of the Faithful is taken from that of Abd Allah ben Abad. We call ourselves Abadia."

ABOU EL-KACEM BEN BRAHIM EL-BERRADI.

" Une petite église fermé!"

May 2nd, 1913.

THOUGH the sirocco has passed on to some other region, it has left its marks upon us all and upon everything around us. It has been the fuse which has set in action all the forces of fire. Since its departure the sun's rays have, each day, burnt more fiercely: the rocks and stones have taken on a deeper note of glistening colour. As the luminous heat intensifies we human beings quail, and seek to hide ourselves in the shadow of such shelter as we may. The nice little wife of the patrone grows whiter and looks pathetic over her cooking: when her one and only servitor suddenly vanishes, she is on the brink of tears. " It is too bad! " she murmurs in a tired voice. " The natives often treat me like this. I don't know what has become of Mohamed." It takes two days to discover that he was picked up on the road, hopelessly drunk,

and clapped into jail, but his terrible lapse from the paths of Mussulman virtue was probably due to the cause from which we are all suffering, more or less. Kaha grows more silent during our promenades; perhaps only for the reason that my questions are rarer, for the flesh is weakening in this tropical heat and the spirit within me. Still, not a mile and a half distant, remains to be explored that mysterious walled-in centre of sanctity where no foreigner, no Jew, no Arab even may ever dwell. As a great concession weary travellers can obtain a lodging for the night, but only in a private house, for caravanserais and cafés simply do not exist. In Beni-Isguen strangers are not wanted. Rumour speaks, with bated breath, of vast treasures stored away; of hoards of gold accumulated in the Tell, in the oases of the Algerian Sahara, and brought there by the Faithful, who have excelled in well doing and have followed righteously in the way pointed out by tradition and by the writings and exhortations of the Fathers of their sect. Though the Abadia, as do other religious bodies, preach detachment from the things of this world, running parallel with this idea,— outrunning it perhaps? — is the eulogy of those who, by their energy, enterprise and contempt of an idle luxurious existence, amass great wealth, of which the dwellers in the M'Zab have so keen an appreciation that they are known as the "Jews of the Desert." "*Kharedjites*" (those who go out) is another title, given to them after the death of the Prophet, when internal strife devastated the Mussulman world and a

certain number of dissentients "went out from obedience," from the *four* orthodox sects, making a fifth (*Khouimes*), and this is the true explanation of the number, as applied to M'Zabites, of which Abdallah's version was an amusing and original variation.

Ali, Mahomet's son-in-law, slaughtered the unfortunate dissenters wholesale, but a few escaped massacre and found a ready hearing and converts in North Africa. The tribes, who resented the rule of the stranger in their midst, caught eagerly at the prospect of grafting the religious idea on to the political one and thus giving the struggle, which ensued, the aspects of a holy war for the best part of two hundred years. In those two centuries Kharedjism became all powerful, but, in the meantime, the dissentients had themselves disagreed on minor points of doctrine, and like their more orthodox brethren, they also divided into four sects, of which by far the most numerous and important was that of the Abadia. Nearly all the Berber tribes of Tripoli, Fezzan, of the Tunisian Djerid, of the Oued-Souf, Oued-Righ, of Ouargla and the Algerian Sahara might be numbered amongst the devoted disciples of Abd Allah ben Abad.

Then came the turn of fortune's wheel and in the year 942-3 of our era, *Kharedjism* collapsed and its adherents were almost wiped out in a desperate struggle with the Rostemides. Of those who survived some went to the Island of Djerba, some to Djebel Nefous: others again fled to the south of

Ouargla on the confines of the great Eastern desert, called El Erg.

This latter handful of Berber Puritans had escaped death by the sword, only to find themselves in an uninhabited and inhospitable region but, for the time being, they were at least safe from political strife and religious persecution. With the most wonderful patience, energy and pluck they laboured for forty years in a wilderness of sand and just as they were triumphing over the natural obstacles they had encountered; just as they were on the point of reaping the reward of their long toil, by the irony of fate, success wrought their ruin. The people of Ouargla thought their own future threatened by such clever and energetic neighbours and attacked the Abadites with a determination and persistence which forced them to fly from the homes they had made for themselves in the Valley of the Oued Mia and to seek a more secure refuge than even El Erg could afford them. This they found in the M'Zab.

Only a people so cruelly persecuted could have elected to pitch their tents in this weird and God-forsaken valley. " Seen from outside, on the north and east, this belt of rocks presents the aspect of group upon group of vaulted tombs, raised one above another without the slightest order: a great Arab cemetery to all appearance. Nature herself seems dead; no sign of vegetation here to rest the eye; even the birds of prey appear to flee the desolation of this spot. An implacable sun sheds his rays on rocky walls of greyish white, which fling them back in still

intenser heat, till they lose themselves in the strange fantastic shadows they have helped to form."

Here the Abadites might hold the world at bay; might defy the orthodox, who not only thought them doomed to perish, in company with Jews and Christians, in the flames of hell, but hastened their departure to that mythical hot region whenever opportunity afforded. Here was indeed a refuge isolated from all men other than themselves; shut off by a vast stretch of country difficult to traverse on account of its aridity, with but a single approach practicable for an invading foe. Apart from this track northwards access was only possible on foot: either by a stony spiral way, with steep ravines, which threatened death at every turn; or, through a path so narrow and so rocky that " its dangers equal the most perilous ascents of the Alps and Pyrenees." Close to its entrance, where two rivers meet, the Abadites built themselves their Sacred City.

Dread of attack still seems to haunt the inhabitants. It is even within this last half-century that Beni-Isguen has been re-fortified according to rather antique European methods: its brick wall replaced at great cost by one of stone and its gardens protected " as if but one idea occupied the minds of the entire community." Did horror of persecution, of flight, of loss of home and fruits of toil so grip their ancestors that fear is reborn in each successive generation? Or is it because their " state of glory " when Islam was at the zenith of splendour is past? That their " state of resistance," when they were

strong enough to fight an enemy successfully, has also gone by with the years; that, now, it is only permitted them to dwell in a "state of secrecy" which they endeavour thus to more completely guard? None but an Abadite may cross the threshold of their Mosques; none but a co-religionist may know the hidden workings of their system. Any Mussulman, who does not believe their doctrine in its entirety, is an infidel and, consequently, outside the law. Any of the Faithful committing a grave social offence thereby becomes an infidel. For Law and Religion are one.

This doctrine has, for their own purposes, been exaggerated by the clerics, who by a process of initiation, known only to themselves, by their superior knowledge and the difference of their habits, have set themselves apart from the laity. Over the heads of their more ignorant followers they hold the terror of the *tenebria,* the decree of banishment and excommunication, as effectual and dreaded as were, at any period in Europe, the thunders of Rome.

Impossible, whatever the temperature, to leave the M'Zab without first penetrating the gates of so fascinating a city! "Kaha!" I said, "summer has come early into this wonderful valley: the heat is becoming unbearable and on Monday you and I will leave for Laghouat, but tell Lackdor that tomorrow we will visit the Caïd at Beni-Isguen."

. . . . . .

As at Ghardaïa, the brown habitations of the Sacred City rise tier upon tier, like an amphitheatre,

enclosed in a high crenelated band of stone curving outwards and upwards and a Mosque with a broken pyramid dominating the whole. The entrance gate stood fairly low down on the hill and we clambered up through little lanes which took queer twists and turnings, sometimes so narrow that I suddenly found myself in deep shadow and then again in a square, or triangle, exposed to the pitiless rays of the sun. Early though it was, every corridor, stairway or open place had been swept and garnished and was most beautifully clean; no litter of any sort to be seen, not even a match, or the smoked end of a cigarette, for smoking is as much prohibited as strong drink in this city of mediæval saints. Except myself and my two guides hardly anyone seemed abroad. Now and again we met sundry male inhabitants and once I thought to have a brief vision of women vanishing down a neighbouring street. Doors seemed to be hermetically sealed, so tight shut were they; not one ajar to let me get a glimpse of an interior, unless it were a little shop with a pale visaged merchant seated behind his counter and a friend or two on benches just within the boundary line. Life and colour there was, every now and again, in those winding paths, when we came upon groups of children, in bright hued garments of orange and red, but so unused were they to a stranger that they either fled from me, as fast as their little legs could carry them, or, if too tiny to escape, they burst into tears.

Whenever I enquired the situation of the Mosque,

it seemed to recede to some area always far distant from that I happened to be traversing, and I never even saw the sacred portals, through which no unbeliever has ever yet passed. As we reached the summit of the hill, which spreads itself out into a rocky plateau, we found an immense ancient watch tower which had formed part of the original fortifications and which, says tradition, was built in a single night by invisible workmen. They had been summoned by a saintly resident, at a certain critical period of the city's history, when the foe was actually nearing the walls. Certainly no enemy could enter the valley unseen since its erection, and I had a superb view, from the lookout, over the surrounding country. The building is about 80 feet high and circular, with accommodation for a large number of men on each of its five stories, well furnished with loop holes, but it amused me to see that the lock of its only entrance was of the same primitive description as that Lisette had found on her studio door in the Place of Happiness. It was a trifle larger maybe and the key was fitted with iron instead of wooden nails, suggesting a dangerous weapon rather than the purpose for which it was intended. As such, whether of wood, or in more modern form, of iron, the keys of the M'Zab play an important part in heated discussions for it is the fashion for the master of every house to wear the key of his castle suspended round his neck. Before prayer, or prior to any religious ceremony if of iron, he must remove it on account of its magical properties, for this super-

stition, which is supposed to be a survival of the stone age, lingers throughout the country, except, perhaps, in the vicinity of iron mines, where it has been ousted by daily contact with the precious mineral. Elsewhere, the dread of it seems so prevalent, that blacksmiths in Algeria form a caste by themselves, can marry only within their own magic circle and are looked down upon by their neighbours as being quite outside the social pale. It has been said, that a Tuareg — a word synonymous with thief and robber — would no more condescend to fight a blacksmith than would a mediæval knight have crossed swords with a commoner.

The Caïd of Beni-Isguen, as befitted his exalted position, displayed an enormous iron key, at least ten inches in length, upon his portly person, like a badge of office and its obvious duplicate had opened the door of the Bureau where we found him, squatting on the floor with two of his subordinates. He was extremely unprepossessing in appearance but tried to be most polite and asked me if I would not prefer to stay in the Sacred City rather than in Ghardaïa, adding almost in the same breath, however, that at Beni-Isguen there were no hotels for strangers! I was extremely pleased when the cool refreshing tea was brought to us, for conversation languished and, as soon as possible, I rose to take my departure, thanking my host for his hospitality and permission to see the town.

And in effect what had I seen of it? The mere outside. What does any European see, or know,

of the inner workings of this primitive civilisation so full of mystery; of the secret springs which set in movement and the links, which hold together, this strange people? For those who go amongst them, a fairy hand rolls back curtains dropped over the centuries and one bends forward with eager curiosity and profound interest to look at the yet living past, to catch elusive glimpses of what has been and here, is still.

When the "state of secrecy" is over and a new era dawns, will this Confederation of the Five Towns be equally enthralling, or more so, is a question for the future; but in the present to have looked upon this Purgatory of rock and stone and the Paradise of Palms man has created beyond it, is, to my mind, well worth the long and weary pilgrimage to the wonderful Valley of the Oued M'Zab.

PART III

AMONGST MOUNTAINS

CHAPTER XVII

THE MAGICIAN

"Medicine is the daughter of Magic."
"The science of letters is the science of the Universe." E. Doutté.

June 1st, 1913.

FOR a week and more I have been located on an eyrie; on a verdant wooded terrace of the Jebel Zaccar Gharbi; with a background of mountain rising up, 2,000 feet and more, behind the town. From it there is a superb outlook over orchards: over trees, laden with blossom in springtime, to be raved about when they dress themselves in white and shades of pink; and bowed down with fruit in the summer, to be robbed of apples and peaches and pears, half hidden by abundant green foliage, and of red cherries which flaunt themselves gaudily and insist on being seen. "For there is always water here, in Miliana," the inhabitants say, with a rejoicing air of pride in their valuable treasure; and the plants, athirst with the tropical heat, drink greedily and flourish greatly in beauty and luxuriance of growth.

This ledge which shelves out from the mountain to allow ample space for the picturesque romantic

little town to rest upon it and spread itself upwards if it feels so disposed, is just about midway between Miliana-Margueritte, at the foot of the Zaccar, and a white-washed *ḳoûba,* which crowns the top, whither women pilgrims flock with hope, in their hearts, as green as the vine covered slopes they climb in the early dawn of the Mussulman Sunday.

On the edge of the shelf, at the Pointe aux Blagueurs, the gossips love to gather under the shade of the whispering trees and to look over the great plain of the Chélif, which lies to the south and east, with its harvest of ripening grain 2,500 feet below. Beyond that again are more mountains: the Ouarsenis, the tree covered Dahras and, far away in the distance, the Southern Atlas of Tell.

It is said to be a dull, depressing little town, with few distractions to vary the monotony of daily life, but to-day it has put on its gayest air, for the annual fêtes of June have attracted young people from Algiers, so that the steam tram, which ascends the first half of this long hill, brought a heavy load of humanity along its windings and, at last, through the avenue, planted with planes, which leads to the Zaccar Gate.

To pass beneath this northern arch is to be straightway in the town, with the market place on either hand, and at the head of the principal shopping street, which latter is likewise the haunt of the idlers. Alternately, on one side or the other, throughout its entire length are cafés and the magnificent trees, which tower above the houses and fol-

low each other in regular order down the rue de St. Paul, invite repose and a chat with one's neighbours under their friendly shade at this meeting place, or at that. Thus the mornings glide pleasantly away and so also the long summer afternoons, with no heed to the chimes of an accusing clock, which calls each passing hour from its ancient dwelling midway down the street. There, at the very centre of the town, as if it were its pulse, it ticks out the seconds in the minaret of an old Mosque, where once the crier stood; and its cheery face looks out from a frame of ivy and green foliage which has grown about its strange home since the wars with the celebrated Emir, Abd-el-Kadr, nearly a century ago. Shrubs planted thickly round the tower are fenced in by iron palings and, on the further side, to-day some Moroccan acrobats took up an excellent position to display their daring feats to the crowd, which gathered around them in the Place Carnot. As usual, it was the funny man, who did everything wrong, or failed to do it at all, that delighted the audience and wrung their pennies from them. As for the rest, they stood on their own heads, or each other's, upside down or right side up and balanced long guns on a wrist, or only a finger, whirling them round and round with consummate ease.

They were a swarthy, shock-headed crew with black locks and a large gold ring in one ear. Half a dozen of them in shorts with a white ground dotted over with red or brown and jackets to match ornamented with arabesques and belted with purple or

yellow, made a picturesque group enough against the background of greenery. The dash of the barbaric in their appearance was enhanced by the weird music of the tomtoms and reed pipes which attracted numerous onlookers and their performance was progressing to the satisfaction of everyone concerned, when suddenly a yell of terror rent the air. The crowd parted, and in all directions each one showed a clean pair of heels for, without the slightest warning, out of the leafy bower behind them and over the heads of the musicians, a shimmering silvery scaly snake, about three feet long, leapt into the air, fell where the acrobats had been, and writhed its way across the Place to the roadway at the further side.

Dreading a succession of such unwelcome visitors, attracted like themselves by the music of the pipes, the crowd, and I with it, drifted up the street to just within the Zaccar Gate at the corner of the Market Place and where already there was a large gathering round a magician from Morocco. He was plying a lucrative trade in amulets, to cure various material and physical ills; and, alternately, giving exhibitions of magic to the usual accompaniment of flutes and of a curious drum, like an earthenware jar, balanced against the shoulder of the boy player, who strummed on the skin drawn taut over the other end.

Conspicuous by their gay clothes amongst this audience was a group of tirailleurs and they kindly made a way for me to pass through them to reach a

high bank against the wall, from which I had an excellent view of the proceedings and of the central figure. The magician was an old man, but straight as an arrow; tall and lean, with a thin face and light blue eyes which had a look in them as if, together with sundry properties of his profession, he kept a private laugh up the sleeve of his blue robe for the most credulous of his patients. On his head he wore a blue and white woollen skull cap and in his right hand, of course, flourished the traditional wand. Before him was a high narrow box with a jointed lid, which only half opened, not to reveal its contents to the curious, and from this he produced a large number of *djedouel* [1] for sale at two, four and six sous apiece.

This form of amulet is based on the continuity of the universe: on the fact, which scientific men are now presenting as a discovery, but which has always been known to primitive peoples, that there is naught in this little world of ours, which exists to itself alone, but that all things of this earth and all of heaven bring their influence to bear upon each other and especially on man.

For Mussulmen there is a great mystery and magic in certain letters: some of those beginning verses of the Koran are quite incomprehensible to human intelligence, say the orthodox. Arab magic has pounced upon them naturally enough, and has made them all its own: has gone further by giving to each one a numerical value, which enhances its importance

[1] Amulets.

by the magic of numbers and brings it into the scheme of planetary influences, signs of the Zodiac, the four elements, the lunar houses, the days of the week and the names of God. Letters and combinations of letters forming words are frequently enclosed in the " embracing circle " for " Allah is behind, enveloping all things," and somewhere or other, as in a *herz,* is generally to be found the familiar figure of King Solomon's Seal. The *djedouel,* I bought for four sous, as a memento of the occasion, has the intersected triangle twice, as a superscription in green ink, and two circles within drawn in red and green respectively, both enclosing many mystic signs and numbers. My immediate neighbours in the crowd were much interested in my purchase and strongly recommended me to pay six sous for another, much superior amulet, but as I was not just then needing its peculiar properties I saved my pennies for the entertainment which was to follow. This was prefaced by an immensely long invocation in which the name of the Saint Abd-el-Kadr recurred frequently and when God was mentioned the crowd simultaneously raised their hands to their faces.

Everyone being now in a proper attitude of mind and of belief, out of the property box the magician produced two brass measures of different sizes about a pint and a quart respectively, together with a long nail which he passed up his nose, promising that soon it would reappear out of the back of his head.

Whilst it was wandering about inside, searching for an outlet, he took a handful of beans and chewing each, threw them one by one into the smaller vessel which he showed us to be perfectly empty. As he did so the nail fell (of course out of the back of his head) with a thud on the ground and hardly had his audience recovered from this marvel than they were confronted with another. The beans had changed into sweets of desire. The little coloured balls of sugar would bring the fulfilment of a wish to whomever eat thereof, and in an incredibly short space of time the measure was empty. The same plan of action produced a quart of *djedouel* which sold like wild fire and, delighted with his skill, the medicine man blessed God, to which the crowd again responded with their accustomed sign. Then came the wonder of wonders: the making of money! In that pint measure beans were turned into copper coins; sous into sweets; bonbons into a shower of five franc pieces in quick succession. Still more impressive was it to see the golden louis emerge one by one from the magician's mouth, where beneath the strained attentive gaze of a myriad of eyes, beans had been put in and chewed; so that the crowd clapped and clapped again led by the magician, who was hugely pleased with his own success. There was no doubt of the reputation he had made for himself amongst his audience, such as it is the chief end and aim of all physicians to engender in their patients and if his cures, of which he now sold more

than ever, were not effectual, it surely would not be from any lack of that faith which is "the substance of things hoped for."

He had come to Miliana, doubtless, as any doctor in the other three continents might have done, to practise temporarily at a resort where suffering humanity presents itself in numbers, and perchance, to offer up prayers also beside the tomb of the patron saint of magicians, fortune tellers, strollers and gipsies, of the renowned and venerated Sidi Ahmed ben Youcef, who chose to end his days in this charming little town.

A picturesque mediæval figure this learned Moor from Andalousia, such as could only be met with in the pages of a history of the Middle Ages. Skilled in the art of healing and in all those sciences preserved amongst the elect of Southern Spain, he toured about Algeria from west to east on his favourite mule accompanied by one devoted servitor, spreading the doctrines of the Prophet and pouring forth the most withering scorn on the heads of the wicked and of those who did not welcome himself with the kindness, reverence and hospitality due to his saintly life and person. Like most Mussulman saints he was a dangerous man to trifle with, as the people of Tenès found to their cost. They thought to trick him with a dish of boiled cat, most carefully disguised and prepared by the best cook in the town. They might have had more sense, we think, who know his powers by tradition! Not for one single instant was he deceived, but seizing the poor beast

by a paw he exclaimed "S'cat!" with such vehemence and conviction that it jumped into its skin with fear, bolted from the dish and vanished into space.

Even then the inhabitants of this benighted city declined to believe in their guest who, naturally disgusted at the treatment he had received, turned his back forthwith upon the city, refusing even to spend a single night within its walls. This made them angry as well as the failure of their little joke, from which they had expected some amusement, so that a rude menacing crowd collected, who followed the departing Sidi. His mule, unaccustomed to be hurried out of a stately jogtrot, fell down and the foremost pursuers caught hold of its rider by his *burnous*. Now this was more than any saint could bear with equanimity and Allah was a witness to the insult. Immediately the earth opened: the whole party of villains fell into the yawning chasm which closed up promptly over their heads and, needless to say, not one of them was ever seen, or heard of, again.

Then Ahmed ben Youcef journeyed on in safety and set his face towards the Western Zaccar Mountains, where he founded a famous zaouïa in his declining days and bequeathed his body, with its healing powers strong in death as in life, to Miliana. Not that he altogether approved of the little town, for it is on record that he said of it: "The women rule there and the men are prisoners," which must indeed have seemed a terrible state of affairs to a Mussulman and a monk withal: a condition of things

surely too strange to be quite true in this country, though one would hardly dare to challenge the departed saint's veracity!

The Mosque, where his tomb has its sanctuary, lies at the back of the town, covering a large area between two streets and raised above the level of the roadway on a white stone terrace planted with trees. From this an archway leads into an oblong and pillared cloister delightfully cool and shady with a tree spreading its branches over each corner and with steps on two sides ascending to an upper gallery, shut off by great painted wooden doors which open to admit women pilgrims, who come to draw water at the ornamental fountain in the centre of the court. It is quite uncanny to see them in such numbers within the precincts of a Mosque and to think that they should occupy the little cells once inhabited by students, who had sat at the feet of the learned saint to drink in wisdom from his lips. At night mysterious lights appear, burn in one place or more for awhile; go out, or move on to another portion of that upper floor and draped figures ascend the steps leading to the terrace from the street. In the daytime they mostly foregather around the tomb itself, sitting within its shadow, lying full length and rolling against it to benefit by the *baraka* which permeates the walls, the floor, the stone, the wood, the drapery, the atmosphere of that high domed chamber. Once only I saw a man, in middle life, with grizzled beard come in amongst them, kneel devoutly at the foot and, lifting the covering of red

velvet, hide himself beneath it, pressing his body against the tomb, but many men of a poorer class pass into a narrow stone space beyond and pray for help from the devoted servant of Sidi Ahmed ben Youcef, who lies buried there.

Wherever possible were little slits for offerings and on one occasion an old woman ran me round to all of them in turn, that I too should contribute to the upkeep of this sanatorium, leaving me at last the poorer by a good many sous.

So well has everything been organised for the comfort of pilgrims coming from afar that, in an outer court there are large stables, placed no doubt under the protection of the saint's mule. The tomb of this remarkable animal is close at hand near the entrance and has large hoof-like holes in the wooden board which fronts it, as if he had given one vigorous final kick out with all his four legs in line when they buried him. On the tiny ledges I found humble offerings of grain.

It can be understood that a large Mosque thus arranged for travellers appeared to the French as most excellent temporary housing for troops when the town was taken, but they counted without their saintly host when they committed this sacrilege. Was it likely that Sidi Ahmed ben Youcef would permit a horde of *roumi* in his demesne? When night came and "lights out" had been sounded what a time those poor soldiers had of it! They fought a mighty army more persistent and invincible than any they had yet been called upon to

face. In countless myriads the enemy swarmed over walls and ceilings and floors and mattresses attacking the Frenchmen with such venom that nothing could overcome and left them no peace, till, worn out by sleeplessness, they fled before the wrath of the dead saint and the insidious foe he had invoked to the rescue; a foe that shall be nameless. It was a terrible lesson to the conquerors and from henceforth, as may be imagined, nothing has been allowed to interfere with the religious uses of the Mosque; nor with the ministrations of the long departed and learned doctor, whose magic power of healing has, it would seem, suffered no deterioration during the many centuries which have rolled by since he exercised it in person amongst the faithful and devoted followers of Islam.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE IRON MINES OF THE WESTERN ZACCAR

"We have made iron descend from on high: therein lurks a source of evil but also of utility to man." KORAN LVII, V. 25.

June 6th, 1913.

"A PRETTY little town inhabited by picturesque idlers," remarks the casual observer, as he strolls through Miliana from the Pointe de Blagueurs and takes up his stand on the hill slopes outside the Zaccar Gate. Yes, it would seem to be so in the avenues of plane trees with all truth, but beneath his feet, did he but know it, dwells in darkness a vast army of workers; of human ants, burrowing, blasting, toiling, the round of the clock where it is always night, to find the ductile metal, which is so precious, that the suggestion of magic clings to it still.

Outside, in the gay sunshine, amidst all the green verdure of a smiling landscape there is so little to be seen of this big enterprise which keeps hundreds of French, Spaniards, Italians, Moroccans, Arabs and Kabyles in the bowels of the earth for the best part of their lives. Afar up, nearing the mountain top, is a long range of building divided into workshops,

restaurant and sleeping quarters for those of the toilers who hardly, if ever, leave the scene of their labours. Below, on another ridge are some engine sheds and, running nearly the whole length of the slope at one side, a line of rails with steel pulleys to lower waggons full of soil to meet the steam-tram at the foot, the beginning of the transport by land and sea to Belgium. That is all that meets the gaze of the curious, or interested traveller, as the eye wanders over the whole mountain side, with an occasional vision of human ants directing the descent of the vans, or coming out into the blinding sunlight for a brief look at the outside world and then diving again into the dark galleries below. Who would imagine that the soil-clad and seemingly impenetrable rock is riddled through and through from summit to base by twenty corridors superimposed and that in this ant heap of tunnels live fifteen hundred men?

"One day," said a geological expert in 1859, "commerce will utilise all the wonderful layers of mineral deposit so abundant in the environs of Miliana," and for the past sixteen years, by dint of infinite patience and unremitting toil, the secret treasure Nature had so carefully concealed within her bosom and which his knowledge revealed to the world, has been removed little by little from the mountain's heart and plunged into the great smelting furnaces of some far distant manufacturing town. The magic and romance of industry this, with all

the patient drudgery hidden away beneath a smiling verdant surface or behind immense brick walls!

It surprised the Director greatly that I should wish to see the workings, "but Madam," said he very courteously, "if you are interested in mines I will place a guide at your disposal." This morning, therefore, I presented myself once again at the Bureau and was escorted up the very toilsome ascent to the nineteenth gallery where was an opening like the caverns of the fairy tales, such as led to the treasure chambers discovered by Sinbad the Sailor. A few paces within the temperature dropped at least ten degrees and night fell suddenly, so that only the feeble flicker of our lamps illumined the many miles we traversed in gloom of endless passages roofed in by rock, paved with rock, walled in by rock. Many twistings and turnings in these long tunnels, for now and again, after persistent boring, still there are no signs of iron; the track is lost, the labour is wasted, experts must come to the rescue and point the way once more. So we went on and on until at last we also faced rock where three men were busy at their monotonous toil, each with a lamp hung up beside him and in his immediate vicinity the holes he had bored ready to be filled with powder for the first blasting of the day. Morning and evening, at 11 and 4 o'clock the workers pour out of the mine for the operations of the powder man. A veritable Guy Fawkes is he with his tin strapped on to his back, sometimes swinging himself up to the holes by

a chain when the incisions are made near the roof and with never too much time to escape the clouds of dust which speedily follow the lighting of the fuse. This scene repeats itself in each gallery, forty times within the mountain every day and when evening comes the workers feel themselves rewarded if they have succeeded in breaking into that solid mass of rock by about *one yard.*

My guide had chosen this particular gallery that I could see a wonderful little engine at work, running along rails to collect perhaps forty vans filled from receptacles, like cisterns, into which the earth, impregnated with mineral, had been emptied from the corridor above. Primed with liquor, this important bustling Puffing Billy headed for the entrance, dragging its loads along at a great pace and enlivening the intense silence of that dark interior by the hiss of steam, the rush of wheels and the scream of its warning whistle.

"Like the tram at Alger," said laughingly a cheery Italian, who had taken it into his head to join us and point out landmarks, which he knew full well, but which my unaccustomed eyes would never have discovered in the gloom.

"We have several hotels, as you can see, where we breakfast," indicating odd corners where some biscuit tins, a few newspapers and a cup or glass were the only signs of a morning meal.

"This is the pneumatic tube, which helps the borers to clear the holes of débris, by means of the pressure of air when it is allowed to escape. That

steep iron ladder will take us down to the gallery below if you would like another promenade in the dark. Ah! look at this!" lifting up his lamp. "Do you see this bed of calcaire which runs side by side with the iron? We lost track of the mineral and the workings have taken another direction. When we turn this corner we may put out our lamps."

Here we were, once more, at the entrance, with Guy Fawkes on the threshold awaiting our exit: outside the glorious sunshine and a vault of blue ether!

CHAPTER XIX

THE WIFE OF MAHOMED AZZIZI

"A jewel hidden in a casket: perfume enclosed in a sealed bottle."

"A woman is like a bouquet of flowers: as soon as she moves the air is filled with perfume."

ARAB PROVERB.

June, 1913.

AS a rule it is not my habit to take much interest in my neighbours — quite the reverse; but when the road which divided me from those living exactly opposite, was so narrow that we might almost have shaken hands across it from our respective balconies, it would have been rather difficult to avoid observing a few of the incidents which made up the sum of their lives day by day.

This was my situation at the only hotel of the little hill town, built on a ledge of the Zaccar mountain, to which chance had directed my steps at the very end of May; but at first sight the closely shuttered dwelling opposite looked as dull and unpromising as could be. It was attached to a long low building, on the whitewashed wall of which big black letters stared me full in the face:

MAHOMED AZZIZI,
Manufacture de Tabac.

Above them was a single tiny window and a sort of sky light in the roof, but no apparent means of entrance except from the adjoining house. Subsequently, I discovered that the Arabs employed in the factory gained admission to it by a door, at the back, opening into a narrow lane opposite a villa.

Various sounds of the day's work reached me from the whitewashed barn; and sometimes, through the fast closed shutters of the house, scolding querulous voices and the wailing of a year old child. After about a week the wooden blinds were pushed back occasionally to admit an old woman on to the balcony with the crying baby in her arms. Perhaps my neighbours had discovered that, for once, it was not a man who occupied the room that overlooked the apartments of Fathima-Zorah, Mahomed Azzizi's young wife who had given her lord a son. Still the mother never appeared though on two or three occasions it seemed to me Haddâ, the nurse, was forcibly propelled from behind and that another figure tried to follow her, but the woman, despite her age, always succeeded in putting up a bar across the windows.

Almost from the first day of my arrival I became well acquainted by sight with the dignified looking proprietor of home and factory, who did not seem to pay overmuch attention to his business, but spent a considerable portion of his time at the Café Maure, which fronted the avenue of plane trees, where they met the furthest corner of our narrow street. Under their leafy shade he sat every afternoon,

surrounded by a little group of friends, listening to the strains of weird Arab music which drifted out of the open windows of the café; its interior almost entirely concealed by masses of pink and red ivy geraniums which clung about the walls.

In the evening after dinner, if I took a stroll in that direction, or went to the Post Office nearby, with letters that must catch the early morning mail; there he was again playing at dominoes, or draughts, with a crony of his own years, which were considerable, for his ample beard was plentifully streaked with grey. Mahomed Azzizi had undoubtedly seen his best days, they lay behind him: perhaps that was why he was taking life so easily now.

It was rather a surprise, therefore, to see him starting for Algiers one morning by the steam tram, which halts outside the Zaccar Gate, and as he was accompanied by a boy carrying a wonderfully decorated box, presumably his errand was on business and his stay would be a prolonged one. The personal luggage of the average Arab when he travels is not usually extensive and for a day or two only it is practically nil. His foreman saw him off with the deference and respect he invariably showed his employer, who seemed to depend and lean upon the younger man, almost as on a son. Abdul-Ahmed certainly appeared to be alert and intelligent enough; in fact slightly too much so. His face had a crafty cruel look and I often thought what an ugly customer he would be to tackle if he were roused out of his habitually quiet demeanour.

That same evening I noticed him again, passing by the hotel very slowly, unlike his wont and gazing up at the windows opposite, almost as if he expected them to open, or some signal to come from within. In fact, he arrested his steps altogether just in front of the house, passing his hand over his beard in a meditative way: but if the inmates saw him standing thus, they made no sign.

Abdul-Ahmed had not long gone by, however, when a sharp click aroused my attention. The shutters opened suddenly, a figure shrouded in some dark stuff slid out between and, closing them behind her, sank into a corner of the balcony.

In the distance I could hear the baby cry.

Although nearly eight o'clock we had not reached the longest day, so it was still light; quite light enough for a man who crossed the road from the hotel to see the face Fathima-Zorah unveiled to him. Then, raising herself with a languorous, panther-like gesture, she returned as she had come from her prison and he, flinging away the cigar he had been smoking, walked away rapidly down the street.

It was the "Beau Monsieur," as he had been christened by the town, and certainly he was an exceptionally tall and fine looking man. Too fair to be a Frenchman I had thought on first seeing him: more like a Fleming, with his somewhat florid look, which might possibly deepen in the future and . . . but why needlessly anticipate?

It happened that when I arrived at the hotel, amongst a great many men I was the only woman

and the negro waiter hit upon the brilliant idea of putting me at a table in the exact centre of the room under the electric light. This stroke of genius not quite pleasing me, I requested a place near one of the windows at the side, whereupon my next meal found me facing the table of the Beau Monsieur. This was scarcely less ridiculous and disconcerting, for he seemed so conceited as to be quite capable of thinking I had purposely made a change for the purpose of sitting opposite to him. Madame Mathieu evidently thought so too, for next day she plunged, *à propos* of nothing, into a little history of the fascinating gentleman. She told me he was the representative of a Belgian Company trading in iron and copper: that he was reputed to be as rich as he was handsome: that he only took his meals at the hotel and lived at a villa on the other side of the factory. Such a pretty villa, shut in by a shrubbery and high gates, with French windows opening on to a long low verandah and everywhere the most beautiful flowers. All this and more in a breath, before it was possible to get a word in edgeways to stop her garrulity, or turn the flood of words into another channel.

Twice every day, consequently, I had been treated to the felicity of contemplating — surreptitiously — the handsome countenance of the Beau Monsieur until the morning of the 24th June. I awoke to find the whole hotel in an uproar, turned inside out and upside down, so to speak, for the wedding festivities of a tirailleur and his bride. The big dining room

was required for the supper and even at breakfast everyone was poked into a back parlour with the artisans and Arabs, except myself. Madame kindly put me into her own little sitting room, for which I was most truly grateful on account of the intense heat. Midsummer Day in that eyrie of North Africa is not an experience I shall feel inclined to repeat.

Breakfast had been earlier than usual to suit the harried waiter and as I entered the hall the newsvendor came into the street crying "Dépêche! Dépêche! L'Écho Alger!" so I went to the entrance to buy one. At that moment the Beau Monsieur came out of the parlour and passed me where I stood, petrified with surprise at seeing a closely veiled figure on the balcony opposite fling down a sou. Fathima-Zorah? . . . She could not read *surely!* Almost simultaneously the house door opened and Haddâ took in the paper the newsboy gave her, but I could hardly see the old woman for the big figure of the Fleming was between us now. He seemed to take the Dépêche quickly from her and . . . pay for it. I distinctly heard the chink of money and one coin dropped with a clang on the tiles. The retreating newsboy heard it too and turned back, thinking no doubt someone had thrown him a sou. I tossed him my forgotten ha'penny which was still reposing in the palm of my hand.

So also Abdul-Ahmed heard it, who had suddenly dropped amongst us from the clouds. He looked ghastly in his fury and spat after the departing figure

of the unconscious *roumi,* who had not even seen him.

The whole affair was over in a few seconds. In a much shorter time than it takes to tell, all the actors in this mysterious little incident had completely vanished leaving me, bewildered and alone, in the street.

The next event of that strange stifling day and night was the arrival of the wedding party in the very late afternoon. They all came together in a body headed by a demure young bride and a good looking groom. Such a picturesque crowd they made, filing down the road two and two; the girls in new gay cotton gowns and the men nearly all in short blue jackets, white pantaloons and red fez: the uniform of the principal regiment stationed in the town. The bride's father, a wealthy Jew, was resplendent in grey cloth beautifully braided in black and a rose coloured sash round his very large waist. At the tail end of the procession followed a few Mokhazni and Arabs in gala attire. There must have been a hundred and fifty, all told, and they seemed wonderfully little affected by the sirocco, which had left me in the condition of chewed twine.

When they were all well inside, I happened to look idly across at my opposite neighbour's, and for the second time that day, fairly gasped at the daring conduct of Fathima-Zorah. She had flung the shutters wide open and was busily occupied in encircling her eyes with *koh'eul,*[1] holding a little glass in her

[1] A black powder; a cosmetic.

other hand. No doubt she had needed light for this delicate operation of the toilette and she was sufficiently far back in the room not to be observed from the street. Still, it seemed a somewhat reckless proceeding for one, as a rule, so jealously guarded.

Where had old Mahomed Azzizi found this wonderful jewel that he tried to conceal within the casket of his home? There was a foreign, barbaric, altogether untamed look about her such as I had not seen in any Arab woman, and she reminded me of the Moroccan acrobats who had performed one afternoon behind the ivy clad minaret in the heart of the town. Her face was too much in shadow for me to distinguish her features: it was her movements that were so fascinating when she laid down the mirror and strayed idly, restlessly about the room as if waiting . . .waiting. . . .

She was so beautifully dressed and decked with jewels that I wondered if she had remembered that this was Midsummer Night, when in the *Mogh'reb* [2] (supposing that to be her country) great fêtes are held in honour of the Eternal Sun. Or, was it through seeing the wedding party opposite that the idea had come to her to attire herself as if for her own bridal? The heavy odour of musk reached me and seemed to fill the hot air.

Presently, she caught up a pale cream coloured *melh'afa,* such as the women wear here, and rolling it round herself came right up to the window. The

[2] Morocco.

contrast to her late gay apparel was so violent and sudden that, in the fast fading daylight, it looked like a shroud. She stepped on to the balcony; took a rapid survey of the empty street; slid back between the shutters and closed them from within. I never saw her again.

Meanwhile the fun downstairs waxed fast and furious. Who would have conceived that any number of people short of a thousand could make such a terrific din. Mercy! . . . What a terrible scream . . . drowned in a shout of masculine laughter. It was hopeless to try and read, so, very reluctantly, I put down my book and wandered back aimlessly to the balcony again. The house opposite was quiet and all in darkness, but there was a light in the factory and someone was working there. Abdul-Ahmed, no doubt, that good and zealous servant of the absent Mahomed Azzizi. How well he looked after his master's interests.

Time dragged on rather heavily for me until the festive party below stairs began at last to break up and as there were really hopeful signs of their departure, I started preliminary preparations to go to bed. The young folk still hung about for some time saying their final goodnights in the street before dispersing in different directions, and watching them troop off I noticed the light had gone out in the factory. Soon after my own followed suit.

A few days elapsed before the big dining room was ready again, for Madame Mathieu had taken advantage of the enforced upset to call in the white-

washers and have a thorough spring clean. When, in company with the others who frequented the restaurant, I took my seat once more in my usual place, what was my surprise to find that, not only the Beau Monsieur, but his table and chair also were gone, and a blank space lay between me and the newly distempered wall.

"Has the Belgian gentleman gone?" I asked the waiter casually, when he brought the soup.

The negro gave me a scared look: then said abruptly in a whisper, "He's dead!"

"Dead!" I echoed incredulously. The man had seemed so full of vitality it was impossible to think of him except as very much alive. That was why the table had been removed altogether then. Africans believe in *revenants* and no doubt the waiter thought the dead man might walk in, take his accustomed seat and sign to him as he had done in life.

"When did he die? Was it an accident?" I queried at the arrival of the next course, but so manifest was his reluctance to talk about the subject that I gave it up and went to Madame after dinner for details of this mystery. She too was rather reticent at first, but her tongue, once fairly started, ran on from long habit and very soon I was in possession of the facts so far as she knew them.

It seemed that when the Beau Monsieur no longer came for his meals Madame thought at first he had gone away, but of that on former occasions he had always given due notice. Then it occurred to her that he might be angry at being put into the back

parlour, so she sent her husband to find out if this, or anything else were the reason, for he was a good customer and she did not wish to lose him.

When Mathieu arrived at the villa he could not make anyone hear, so he knocked at a window that was ajar, and receiving no response walked into the room, and from that into the adjoining apartment, for he saw the figure of the Beau Monsieur lying on the bed. He was fully dressed with the coverlet drawn up over him — so it was discovered subsequently, for the horrified Mathieu had at once rushed off to the police. There were no signs of violence and the room was quite undisturbed: nothing seemed to have been touched, or taken from it. In the little salon were the remains of a meal. Wine had been spilled on the table, but strangely enough there was no bottle, or glass, to be seen.

Some said it was murder: some said suicide. It was all a terrible mystery at present. Parts of the body had been sent to Algiers and Mathieu would have to attend the enquiry, though the Beau Monsieur must have been dead for about two days when he found him yesterday morning. Such a fine handsome gentleman . . . but I heard no more, for my mind had seized upon "dead for about two days when he found him yesterday morning." . . . One incident after another came back to memory: little things that fitted themselves into place as in a puzzle. Of course there was not the slightest doubt about it. This awful tragedy had happened on Midsummer Night.

CHAPTER XX

THE COMING OF THE BRIDE

"We are sons of Adrar Boudfel:[1] *every morning we salute it."* KABYLE SAYING.

July 22nd, 1913.

BETWEEN the Mediterranean on the north and the great chain of Snow Mountains which finish to the west in the "Pass of the Reed" and eastwards by the "Pass of the Law," lies the Land of Great Kabylia, with its many tribes of mountain shepherds, who, in their hill fastnesses, succeeded in keeping the world at bay from early Roman times, till the French at last subdued them little more than half a century ago.

Martins, Nightingales, Larks, Hermits, Sorcerers, Snails, People of the Mountains, Mountaineers, Sons of Mohammed, Moses and Joseph, or of The Brave, are but a few of the characteristic names these dwellers in the villages, which crown the hill tops, have called themselves. Their hamlets too bear equally descriptive titles of their situation, overtopped and sheltered by the Djurdjura Mountains, as Europe prefers to call the peaks, snow capped for half the year, which band them in.

[1] The great Range of Snow Mountains

In Great Kabylia it is possible to live on the Big Little Mountain; on the Top of the Steep Slope, or of The Column; amongst the Bad Stony Places; on the Little Hill of the Blacksmiths, or that of the Pilgrims; on the Excrescence of Dried Figs; on the Little Rock; even in a Puff of Smoke or a Vaulted Tomb. They are not, it must be granted, altogether attractive titles especially to lazy people, but the builders of the birds' nests had to bear in mind that, whereas the slope of a hill may be cultivated for man's benefit, the stony wind-swept peaks are valueless, and every foot of promising soil is worth more than any considerations of mere comfort in a poor country, where Nature is a hard, ungenerous Mother.

The long backbone of bare arid ridges, with Lélla Khadidja, its highest point, looks down with lofty condescension on these clusters of brown houses of stone and mud mortar, dominated by a whitewashed *Djemmâ*[2] and perhaps as well by a *koûba* with its conical top and crenelated corners.

Then, though the Great Snow Mountains barred out the stranger in the past, neighbours were not always friends. Each village jealously guarded its pasturage from flocks which might stray uninvited: here alone was a frequent cause of trouble. Worse feuds were handed down from one generation to another and ended perhaps in the extinction of whole families. A blood debt was held to be legal; as well

[2] Literally meeting place, i. e., mosque.

was it socially binding (even in the same village) and could never be satisfied in coin as in the Valley of the Sahel. A life was worth a life amongst the Kabyles of the Djurdjura. Hill tops, therefore, afforded some measure of security and when it happens that a clump of houses lie on a sheltered plateau, it must have been a *m'rabet* who settled there originally and perhaps founded a zaouïa, for the sacred character of building and inhabitants would alone exempt them from all attack.

In these peaceful times, held in a close grip of European civilisation, the landscape is altogether charming and unique, with smiling villages, dotted about in every direction, on different heights thrown up by eruptions of a byegone age long before our first ancestors made their appearance. The harvest has just been gathered in and on a plateau, oxen yoked two, or three, abreast tread out the golden corn; for in the fields of Great Kabylia, Time has stayed his footsteps two thousand years or more, as if loth to sweep off the earth's entire surface all the picturesque and ancient ways of man. It was outside the little hamlet of Icherridhen that I saw them, on my way to visit the Sons of John at their village of the Sweet-Scented Evergreen Trees quite near to The Tower of the Steeple Jack.

Great doings were afoot for an important member of this fairly large community was awaiting his bride. She was coming from a village about twenty-five miles distant and, overnight, his friends had

gone to fetch her and form an escort of honour to protect her on this, no doubt the longest — perhaps the only — journey in her young life.

Long before my arrival I could hear the powder speaking and see puffs of smoke rising straight up in the clear hot air. My companion, with a gun slung over his shoulder fired it off at intervals as we climbed up the long narrow straggling street, till we reached an empty building ready evidently for our reception, for it had been newly swept and there were mats and pillows on the ground.

My invitation had come through the uncle by marriage of the bridegroom, whose brother was acting as host in the usual kindly manner of those for whom hospitality is a religious duty. He ordered couscous and coffee to be brought and immediately the room filled up with men guests, who slipped off their shoes at the doorway before entering. So alike were these in size, shape and colour, I could not help wondering if they get mixed up as top hats do in England and if the wrong pair of feet ever go away in a better pair of slippers than their very own!

After I had rested my host suggested that he would present me to the ladies of the family, for said he: "Here we are not savage as they are in the South: we do not hide away and veil our women. The bride will be veiled to-day and for the festivities before her marriage, but never afterwards!"

I followed him to a large double gate, leading into an irregular quadrangle, with buildings on either

side, on rising ground, finishing at the back by a stairway in the hill. Up as far as the lowest step, massed together on this stony sloping rockery bloomed the most gorgeous flowers; not wild, nor yet cultivated, but in favour before hot-house exotics had come to stay with us. A magnificent bridal bouquet mostly red and yellow; the colours of love and desire; the hues, which combined, project the sacred essence. Some of the blossoms were still in bud; some half opened, but in all their first freshness; others in the fulness of bloom. Yellow wallflowers there were in great profusion, shading into red and even to a dull brown. Sunflowers turned their faces toward the giver of light, who could not reach them beneath the pent roofs of long low sheds. Gorgeous peonies of all shades; poppies, red, yellow and white; jonquils crimson tipped; African marigolds, in their own native land, flaunted themselves gaudily before my astonished gaze.

"How beautiful!" I cried to the Kabyle beside me. "You do well not to hide your women when they are so fine to look upon as these!" He stared at me blankly: he could not understand my admiration!

They were all grouped together, numbering about a hundred; women, girls and little ones awaiting the signal to go forth and meet their new kinswoman. It came now with a fusillade and music and an announcement from my breathless and excited friend, Amou, that the bride had arrived at the next village,

about two miles away, and it was time for us to start. We were ahead for a time, he and I, with the three musicians immediately behind us; but the pace was too great for me and at a point where two roads ran parallel, but one much higher than the other, I was glad to take a seat for a while on the latter. From my perch, I could look down on the procession as it wound along the hill sides, between the green of the figtrees, or out on the open highway in the full glare of the sun. What a splendid physique the women had, with the erect carriage which comes of carrying a water jar poised on the head; and what a joy it was to see them walk as they swept on their way in their striped petticoats of red and yellow! Tiny girls, in gay hued *gandouras,* covered over with white pinafore frocks dotted with round coloured moons, were now at this end, now at the other; everyone of them rouged like their mothers with *khaloûk* in great even patches, covering nearly the whole of their little fat cheeks.

In that great crowd how grave everybody was: not a laugh, or even a smile animated any one of the faces! Now and again the women united in the shrill iou-iou that is such a feature of all festivals; or the men fired their rifles and were answered from some neighbouring hamlet below, or above us, on its verdant height. Thus we traversed about a mile.

Quite suddenly we came upon the bridal cortège: a little group on muleback drawn up together, awaiting our advent round a wide projection of rock, which had hidden us from each other. The ad-

vance guard of our party fired a salute which set the mules dancing and the bride's was perilously near the edge of the ravine. Amongst her escort was an elderly dame with a pronounced double chin which no amount of yellow spangled gauze could hide; and there were several men about her, friends of the bridegroom who had gone to fetch her the previous day. She rode pillion behind the aunt of her fiancé, who was clad and veiled completely in green of the Nile, for she was the "bringer" of the bride and here again was a colour symbol lingering on from some remote period of time. The little maid herself was draped in white and pale yellow and no doubt it was the rearing of the pony that had shaken back the folds from her face, revealing a pair of lustrous brown eyes like those of a startled gazelle and cheeks flushed pink, with excitement as well as *khaloûk*.

Wishing her such happiness as may be desired by a woman of the Djurdjura, at the bend of the road, at the beginning of her new life, I left her in company with the men and women, who had so greatly welcomed her in their midst and whom she would soon count amongst her kindred. With them she pursued the rest of her journey to the young husband awaiting her with his gifts under the shade of the Sweet-Scented Evergreen Trees, whom she would not even see until she was his wife.

CHAPTER XXI

THE GREAT FAST

" Toi qui es Ramadhane, celui qui, tous les ans, nous fait, souffrir de la faim et de la soif."

ISABELLE EBERHARDT.

August 14th, 1913.

IN the brown villages of Kabylie, flecked here and there with white, that crown the hill tops of this mountainous land, for the greater part of the year to all appearances, the Faith of Islam languishes and is nigh unto death. That they are not good Mussulmen is a constant reproach against the inhabitants, which brings them into contempt with Arabs and M'Zabites alike — Berbers all — who would scorn to be thought akin in any way to these lax co-religionists and despised eaters of acorns.

By way of explanation, or excuse may be, the Kabyles say that the observances of the Plains and of the Plateaux are not suited to dwellers on the slopes of Djurdjura and in Sahel; and this they carry to an extreme in some hamlets where even the *djemmâ* has been allowed to fall into such a state of disrepair that it cannot be used, and yet no attempt is made to build it up again.

After a prolonged stay in the South, it comes as a miss in one's life not to hear the appeal of the criers as they mark the passing of the day. Strange too it is, beyond belief, to find that all the crowd by the roadside sleeps through the passing of *Dhour;* [1] that at *El-Aser* [2] and *Mogh'reb,*[3] of the hundreds who go by intent on business, not anyone will stay his steps awhile to say a prayer. Thus the religion, which is so much in evidence throughout the Sahara, permeating every act of life, public and private, here in Kabylie seems conspicuous by its absence; or, at least, as if it had no grip whatever on the existence of these toiling mountaineers.

Then, suddenly, on the night of the ninth moon after Achoûrâ, always ten days earlier than in the previous year, when the beautiful silver crescent, the emblem of Islam, is hardly yet shaped and displays but a milky paleness on a dark clear background of sky, the Kabyles, men and women, show the world that they are Mussulmen all and bear testimony to their Faith. For a month whilst that moon waxes to the full and then slowly wanes until it disappears, they keep, rigidly and sincerely, the hardest carême of any religion of the world, the Great Fast of Ramadhane.

Like the Great Feasts, the rites of abstinence date from far back in the history of mankind, when primitives, hardly above the level of the animal, believed

[1] 2nd invocation of the day.
[2] 3rd invocation of the day.
[3] 4th invocation of the day.

that the incidents of their own existence acted and reacted on the plant life by which they were surrounded; that as man reproduced his species so the vegetation was abundant and when the harvest had been gathered in he controlled his bodily appetites to be in unison with Mother Earth, as she rested to renew the forces temporarily exhausted by her fecundity. The spirit of that idea, that first discipline of the savage state which gradually led on to higher forms of civilisation has been lost in the progress of the world, but its outward manifestation still survives as a religious observance common to all earlier forms of creed.

This year, it so happens that Ramadhane has fallen in the hottest month, when the dry scorching air is rarely freshened by the precious drops a rain cloud sends to earth; when the sirocco is a frequent visitor parching the throat and lips and creating a thirst which is fiendish in its intensity and can, at best, be scarcely assuaged. Yet, from the first hour after midnight till the setting of the morrow's sun, no water, no food must pass the lips of these poor suffering mortals, who are my near and kindly neighbours now. This morning only I arrived at a village, the name of which sounds like a prolonged sneeze, and have been given a lodging in a schoolhouse, fortunately empty in holiday time.

It is a white-washed building, close to the entrance of the village and abutting on the open air meeting place of the inferior *Soff*[4] for, strangely

[4] Political party.

enough, every village is like a "house divided against itself." In it there are invariably two parties, more or less at enmity with one another and separated by an acknowledged and definite geographical boundary. If a quarrel is started every man rallies around the member of his own *Soff* and rifles and blunderbusses appear from hiding places in a most surprising number considering the strict laws (impossible to enforce) against the carrying of arms by natives.

Sometimes it happens that a man buys a wife, whom he particularly fancies, from the enemy's territory, but if so, she goes out from her own kith and kin for the rest of her days and has nothing more to say to the friends of her childhood who live within a few yards of her home.

It is difficult to find a reason for so curious and apparently unfortunate an arrangement, for the legend which is connected with it seems inadequate especially after a great lapse of time; and not applicable, one would imagine, to all villages without exception.

In the far away past, it is said, a certain couple, very devoted to each other, owned a negro slave who, for some reason best known to himself, which history has not divulged, was determined to separate them. He first worked on the woman's feelings by telling her that misfortune was coming speedily as her husband had found a new wife whom he was about to marry, younger and prettier than herself, whose charms had faded. Having fully per-

suaded the unhappy creature of the truth of his statements, the slave told her the one chance of preserving her present influence over her husband was by shaving off half his beard at night as he lay asleep. As soon as his victim had expressed her willingness to try and keep her man by any means in her power, the negro sought out his master to tell him that, without doubt, his wife was plotting to kill him and if he would watch at night, instead of sleeping, he would find her standing beside him with a razor in her hand. This came to pass as the wretch had been able to predict with such confidence and the husband, fully believing in this apparent proof of his wife's guilt, struck her with violence, so that she fell dead. Retribution swiftly followed on his rash act for her father, who lived in another quarter of the village, called his friends together to help him and murdered his son-in-law on the threshold of his house. Thus was started a blood feud between two families, kept up from generation to generation, not only between themselves but dividing in two inimical sections the inhabitants of every village throughout the land.

In the little hamlet where I am at present located the line of demarcation starts about half way up the hill with a ruined and picturesque archway, the gate to the enemy's camp. On its further side are two long adjoining sheds well furnished with wide stone *dokanat* where, on this tenth afternoon of Ramadhane the men of the superior *Soff* had foregathered and were stretched out at full length, ex-

hausted with hunger and awaiting with patient resignation the cannon from Fort National, which announces each evening to all these starving people that the sun has set at last and they may eat.

The narrow passage, which runs right away through the quaint club houses, is also, it would seem, the main artery of the village for, as I too rested on a *dokana* near the lower entrance, the boys came in from the fields, or pasturage, at little intervals apart, driving before them flocks of goats and sheep, sometimes headed by a donkey, which pushed against and nosed each other as they clambered up the rude steep steps, covering us with dust. This and the sight of a man opposite to me, whose face grew more and more leaden in hue, as the minutes passed slowly by, drove me out to the fountain right away down at the foot of a long hill, that I could see the clothes of the women and girls and admire their faces which are, now and then, as charming as their statuesque figures and pose. In parties of two and three or even half a dozen, following each other single file, they tripped lightly along the different winding tracks, and their gay striped petticoats, coloured *foutas* and *guenader,* shewed up well against the trees and the verdure of the slopes.

"We are nothing to look at," cried one cheery body, more or less in rags, as she passed with her companions. "Wait awhile, the younger and richer ones are coming behind in their finery and jewels: we are ugly and old!" Then, sure enough a troop of merry girls arrived and one small mite

with them, very important, an amulet hanging below her waistbelt at the back and swaying with the movements of her plump little person, as she carried her jar, full of water, steadily up the steep ascent. The old fashioned pottery is delightful to the eye but when filled the weight is unthinkable and it is little wonder that the women are replacing their heavy jars by petrol tins: it were a sin to wish it otherwise merely to please the æsthetic sense. Besides the white shining metal is not without its charm when the sun catches at it between the overhanging branches; plays about the corners, taking off the squareness of the vessel with its glint and illumines a pretty face below.

The first comer is dark, with crisp curly hair bushed out a little above her ears, as the women wear it here before they turn their plaits up under their *mendilat*. Evidently in her there existed a strong admixture of negro blood, though the lips were not so full and coarse as might be expected. The next profile, which she almost hid in passing, had a Semitic look about the nose and cheek, and the third girl, following behind, might have hailed from Northern Europe with so white a skin, her aquiline nose and blue grey eyes. In violent contrast, her hair was black as night, dull-looking, almost in ropes. Like many another of her sex the world over, she had spoiled herself in obedience to the decrees of Dame Fashion, who only permits her votaries in Kabylie a coiffure that shall vie in colouring with bog oak. Those ugly dyed tresses should

have been soft and fine and glossy, of a pale golden brown. In their anxiety to be à la mode little fair girls begin the darkening process when quite young and it is a funny sight to see them bending over a wash tub full of a preparation of oak apple, just like ink, pouring it over their tousled heads, till it streams down their faces making niggers of them for the nonce. Others prefer an ointment and tie up their hair in cotton bandages for three days to produce this bizarre result. Therein, no doubt the charm! It is the unusual that attracts and the variety of type amongst these hill women, especially near the Western sea gate of Kabylie, where dwell the Aït Ouaguennon whose loveliness is proverbial in their own country.

Strangely enough this great mixture of race, which has beautified the women, seems to have robbed the Kabyle men of any claims to good appearance. As a rule, they lack the appearance of breeding, the fine stately manner and slow gestures of the Arabs. In fact they are mongrels and mostly look it. This struck me forcibly when I neared my lodging again and took a long look at the little hungry crowd belonging to my *Soff*. It had increased considerably during my absence and now formed an extended semicircle, like a horse shoe, facing a stove from which arose a fragrant scent of coffee. "These last moments are the most feverish of all in the day," wrote one who had rigorously kept the Fast and I could realise it from the stillness that prevailed; the tenseness of tired limbs kept under a grim con-

trol, the look of anxious expectancy depicted on those pale and weary countenances. All eyes were turned towards the West; towards the mighty orb which plays so great a rôle in men's lives, but even more so where its rays burn fiercest. The red disk, inflaming the sky with rays of vivid orange shot through with crimson, was sinking slowly behind the hills . . . now, nothing to be seen but a golden rim . . . even the radiance was fading . . . was gone. The sun had set! Strained ears caught the welcome sound of distant cannon which announced the breaking of the Fast. Quickly in every man's hands a little cup. Relief filled all the air — an immense relief. Praise be to God! the sufferings of another day were ended. Nature had again been fought successfully and vanquished. Welcome night had brought release from the spell imposed upon them by their creed.

CHAPTER XXII

A FÊTE OF RAMADHANE

"Attitudes graves, sourires discrets, beaucoup de tristesse inconsciente souvents, gestes lents et rhythmés balancement voluptueux des hanches."

ISABELLE EBERHARDT.

August 20th, 1913.

TWO evenings in the week, throughout Ramadhane, there are rejoicings in my village in honour of the boys, who are keeping the Great Fast for the very first time. They have arrived at the dignity and, with it, the responsibilities of manhood: a great event this, in their young lives, equivalent to a coming of age in the West. As such, it should certainly be marked in the Kabyle Calendar of youth, and it may be that these entertainments relax the strain and weariness of the month of abstinence for old and young alike. It were surely an unwise creed that forbade festivities during the strenuous Fast it has enjoined, thus making too impossible a demand upon poor human nature during the Mussulman Lent.

On Tuesdays and Saturdays then, Market days both — the one at Michelet, the other at Tizi-Ouzou — always distinctive in the week's work, the

revels of my *Soff* begin with the rising of the moon and last far into the night. It is scarcely worth while to snatch at sleep when in the darkness of the morrow, at 1 A. M. at latest, food should be eaten preparatory to a fast of nearly eighteen hours, during most of which must be borne, with patient resignation, the burden and heat of a strenuous day.

Where the fête will be held, in which house, or courtyard, is not announced till the very last moment; but the beating of the tomtoms, heard all over the village, soon fixes the locality and I have even seen men of the rival *Soff* stroll down, to look on at the proceedings, attracted perhaps by the superior charms of Zêna; Noowahra's well balanced movements; or Fathma's voluptuous grace.

Last night a large quadrangle was chosen, formed by huts on three sides and on the fourth, a bank of earth, which had been built up to the level of a habitation, much higher on the slope of the hill than any of its near neighbours.

Like chattering birds on a telegraph wire, a row of tiny laughing girls clung to the edge of the platform and looked down on their elders, crouched in close ranks below, their *mendilat* fluttering in the soft breeze, their heads bending and swaying as do the night flowers, which only unfold to honour the moon. A fitful light fell upon them all, from candles which were fixed on excrescences jutting out from the mud walls and not difficult to find, and from a strange little oil lamp, a relic of old Roman days held by a damsel, who stood within a doorway

shielding the leaping flame with her henneh tinted hand. Its flare had more the effect of illuminating herself than anything or anyone else; her own pretty oval face with its clear skin framed by dark bands of hair and the vivid green and red of the silk kerchief, which enveloped her head. A gay garden of girls, this group, all clad in their finery and mostly wearing a striped *fouta* of silk, over a chemise, in the fashion somewhat of a pinafore, brooched in front on both shoulders and puffed out fully above a wide multicolored, or red scarf, which encircled the waist. The band served also to gird in a veiling of white muslin, which draped them at the back from neck to heel and which, continuing in long wide sleeves the whole length of the arm to the finger tips, during the rhythmic movements of the dance, gave a delightful impression of wings.

Immediately facing them, but separated by an open space — none too large — left clear for the dancer, was a group of men, sitting, lounging, or crouched up against the walls of a low rectangular hut, which lay entirely in shadow. The whole of the front row was occupied by the musicians, supplemented by an orchestra of seven singers, who stood in an irregular line, shoulder to shoulder so far as their varying heights permitted, and kept up a continuous chant, beating their hands together in unison and with tremendous force. It seemed their especial business to inspire the dancer with their own astonishing enthusiasm. Occasionally they would turn to each other when repeating certain portions

of the song, as if in earnest conversation, but always clapping, clapping, with unflagging energy and zeal.

There were many tunes and measures. Sometimes a girl would attempt one too quick for her powers, or unsuited to her style and with a diffident, apologetic smile, she would fall back into the ranks amongst the rest and let another take her place.

A very unprepossessing old lady, in dull and untidy garments, acted as hostess. She, it was, who chose the dancers, calling upon them one at a time, except in the case of two tinies who made their début before their little world in company, and with great success.

The night wore on. The crowd of men increased and extended along both sides of their portion of the square, yet never infringing on, or mingling with the smaller group of women. The quaint Roman vessel, exhausted of oil, flared up suddenly, with a last effort, and went out. The candles burned low and were extinguished finally by the night wind. Needless to replace them, for the moon at the full, which had been sailing slowly upwards in the heavens, was right above us now; seemed hanging from a dark and starless sky, like a radiant silver lamp, flooding all the court with light.

The musicians, who had rested awhile, took up their instruments again with renewed zest. "In-châh-Allah, In-châh-Allah," chanted the chorus, beating their hands together. Then, slowly, with infinite grace in every gesture, out from amongst the women, stepped Barbousha, premère danseuse of them all,

letting those she passed by arrange her draperies for her, as if she were a queen. When she reached the open space she stood for a moment with outstretched arms, like a butterfly half dazed that had been tricked by a tropical moon and had awakened thinking it was day. Bands of crimson and gold, striped horizontally, ran across her lithe body, down the forearms to her wrists, below the silken scarf that bound her waist, until they reached her slender ankles and partly hid her naked feet. Her eyes were bent on the ground as she danced and her face was grave, even to sadness, beneath the fringed ends of the *mendil* knotted just above her brow. One arm she bent till her finger tips reached to her shoulder, let it drop by her side: repeated the action with the other hand and, turning quickly her body, incredibly supple below the waist, rose and fell, keeping time with the movements of her feet. With her perfect balance she seemed to be soaring. All white she was now, a moth in the moonlight with outspread snowy wings that fluttered and fluttered . . . anon a butterfly, when she faced round again, gorgeously painted in crimson and gold. The incarnate spirit of her race and sex, always in movement, trying to rise, yet scarcely stirring beyond a narrow circle covered by her feet, bound by the silver fetters which chinked to the measure of the dance. A captive winged creature seeking vainly for release, and the women screamed their ou-iou ou-iou in her honour till, wearily, she fluttered back amongst them and sank upon the ground.

CHAPTER XXIII

MEKTOUB REBBI

"Resignation is the great virtue of the Eastern races. More religious than Christians, Mussulmen can submit to misfortune better than we can: better than we do, they bow before the inevitable which they cannot understand and, their task accomplished, resign themselves to the Will of the Most High." HANOTEAUX ET LETOURNEUX.

23rd night of Ramadhane,
August 26th, 1913.

HOW passing strange it seems that there are no special preparations for to-night: that the Mussulman world is asleep and apparently heedless of the Recording Angel, who hovers, during these dark hours betwixt sunset and dawn, beside the Great Tables of Destiny, which are as long as the earth and the sky, and as wide as the East and the West. Are the followers of the Prophet then devoid of hope, such as sustains the majority of human beings in the battle of life: and equally so of the fear of misfortune, of loss, of death which dogs the footsteps of most of the children of men? True, they have fasted rigorously throughout twenty-three long summer days, yet to-

night, the Night of Destiny, why are they not at prayer? Why are they not repenting, even at this eleventh hour, the sins and offences which, in nearly every case, outweigh the good deeds set against their names: they being but mortals who have erred and gone astray?

A marvellous pen inscribes good and bad actions in the little life of each man and the greater, more complex, existence of a nation on one side of the Register kept by the angels for a year: on the other side are the judgments of God. So long is the pen that a horseman could not ride its length, even at a gallop, in the space of full five hundred years.

Before morning breaks, all that has happened in the past twelve months will have been set down. Not that alone! All those events as yet concealed within the womb of Time; all that will be in the unborn year; Allah's irrevocable Will; His "unalterable decisions" [1] shall be written before the rising of the sun.

"Inshallah!" (God willing!) the Mussulman murmurs, when he forms some plan; when he looks to gain some material benefit; before he stumbles blindly forward on some step of life's journey, as do we all, hoping for the best.

"It is written!" "Mektoub Rebbi!" he says, with patient resignation, when hopes prove unavailing and his efforts have been all in vain.

To a very few, the saints and friends of Allah, it is occasionally permitted to gaze in dreams, or vi-

[1] El-Kadr—The night of unalterable decision.

sions, on these sacred Tablets: to read on these stone pages the destiny reserved for themselves and, more often, for others. Of such are the Seers and the Prophets: of such was Lélla Fathma, whose story belongs to the beautiful Pass, which lies between Michelet and Maillot, on the further side of the Djurdjura Mountains.

Delightful as is the drive from Tizi-Ouzou to Michelet, it is but a preparation, as it were, for the beauties and surprises of the road which leads to the great range through a Punch Bowl (the Devil's own in hot weather) beyond the Col de Tirouda. To begin with the path is quite ordinary in itself, running along the eastern and then on the western side of the mountains, but after it crosses a narrow saddle between the lower hills and Azerou Tidjer, the automobile passes over a series of embankments and galleries, then through two small picturesque tunnels. Towering above are high peaks, notably Azerou-n-Tohour and deep, deep down on the left, two quaint Kabyle villages of the most approved pattern, Takleh and Tirouda.

So unusual is their position, so encompassed about by mountains, so swallowed up in the narrow gorge where they have been built; so tiny do the huts appear, viewed from some thousand feet above, and so unreal as dwellings, that they might well be taken as models for the scene of a fairy play, for abodes of the little people rather than of grown-up men and women.

Instead, it had been written, that these two peace-

ful villages, in an almost inaccessible gorge, hardly discoverable save at their very approaches, should be the centre of a human tragedy, with Lélla Fathma as the heroine, overborne by her irresistible, relentless fate.

Moreover, she knew it would be so! She herself, a *M'rabta* of the tribe of the Illiten, had prophesied the coming of the Christians to Kabylie: their conquest of her people: her own captivity: yet . . . she hoped on; hoped against hope; against knowledge; against *what was written!* Poor Lélla Fathma! She could not realise that "man is but a plaything for the caprice of Time! Ah, yes! Who struggles against fate is always vanquished!"[2] When the French troops invaded their country, the Illiten, counting on her help and protection and also on an open passage to the other side of the mountains, brought their wives, children and goods to the *M'rabta* and placed them in her care. Then they occupied the heights, determined to defend the villages at all costs; or at least, to safeguard the flight of fugitives, which would be inevitable if they failed to hold their own and drive off the enemy. They had firm faith in Lélla Fathma's supernatural gifts. She had been known to heal and to work miracles and she had promised to do her utmost for her people. It may be that she had come to believe greatly in herself and that the elements would aid her in her sore necessity, for when she heard the French were approaching, she tried to conjure up a storm.

[2] Arab saying.

Meantime her brother, the *M'rabet* Sidi Thareb, had been concocting a diplomatic little scheme of his own, which he proceeded promptly to put into execution. He went himself to General Jusuf and explained that though he personally was a devoted friend of France, he had not been able to convert his tribe to his way of thinking. However he had come to offer his submission and, as a guarantee of his good faith, his services also to the French. He was willing to act as their guide and conduct them over the best route to the heights, which commanded the territory of the Illiten, provided that his own villages of Takleh and Tirouda were left entirely unmolested. The wily old *M'rabet* hoped thus to save his own property; keep up his sister's reputation and take the troops wherever might be most convenient and certainly well out of the range of that narrow straight gorge, where the Illiten were depositing their families and their goods with all possible speed.

The French were a little taken aback by the sudden submission of Sidi Thareb, but they were in a mountainous country particularly difficult of conquest and glad enough to have two villages neutral, as well as an ally.

They accepted the terms. The movements of the Kabyles had puzzled them not a little and at first they had concluded the Illiten were already flying to the further side of Djurdjura. General Jusuf's spies, however, were busy and, all unknown to Sidi

Thareb, the French Commander had become aware that the tribe's emigration stopped at the heights. He immediately ordered a division to occupy the Peak of Azrou-n-Tohour, in order to effectually cut off the retreat of the enemy, and when that was captured, the French became at once completely masters of the situation.

Acting under the orders of Sidi Thareb, the men of Takleh and Tirouda had taken no part in this engagement and the *M'rabet* believed that his diplomacy would be crowned with success. Mounted on a white mule, he guided the troops of the Brigade Gaston along paths on the left side of Ackour and carefully avoided any tracks which led to Takleh and Tirouda. Although a few shots had been fired by stray Kabyles at the French, there had been no response from the latter, who were fully occupied with their perilous ascent.

All was quiet: everything was going well.

Then Fate stepped in and, taking matters into her own hands, she played havoc with the *M'rabet's* best laid plans. She chose a few Zouaves of Gaston's Brigade, guided by Sidi Thareb, as her tools. The irony of it! They sighted some fugitives who had been driven out of the first village on Ackour by General Jusuf and, unable to resist temptation, they took pot shots at them, trying to pick them off across the deep ravine by which the two parties were separated. The Kabyles were seeking the protection of Lélla Fathma, but were hampered by their

women and children so could only go slowly and the Zouaves, dominated by the hunter's instincts, rushed after them down the steep descent.

Panic seized the hunted. As they poured into the villages they cried out that the Christians were upon them; were slaying right and left. As a matter of fact there were but five Frenchmen, but Lélla Fathma feared the worst and her people began to arm. They killed one man and wounded the rest, but then other Zouaves, excited by the firing, came to the rescue of their comrades.

The little company of forty or fifty, who arrived, stopped short at sight of the armed Kabyles, but having no officer with them, they began to fire and the Illiten responded, naturally enough. Then the Zouaves, finding themselves outnumbered, sounded the bugle for help and one, slightly wounded, dragged himself back to the Brigade and told the whole story to a certain Captain Fourchault, renowned for his daring. "Our men down there," he cried when he heard it. "Sound the charge!"

The Illiten, thinking the whole French army was upon them, fled right and left when officers and men came pouring into the valley and overran it. Then followed a general pillage and every house was entered . . . save one.

It was the largest in the villages, perhaps the only one that might be dignified by the name of "house" and was closed and locked. Its inmates silently refused to open to the enemy.

Stationing some of his men outside, in case of

armed resistance, Captain Fourchault ordered that the door be broken down. As the first blows fell like thunder against the hard wood, it was flung back wide from within and on the threshold stood Lélla Fathma.

She was clad in magnificent attire and bejewelled like an idol. Her cheeks were rouged, her eyebrows blackened with *koh'eul,* her hands stained with *henneh,* her face partially concealed by a white veil. She stepped forward with the air of a queen amongst her subjects, but as her great dark eyes wandered over the faces of the crowd, that filled her courtyard, they fell on her brother, Sidi Thareb, and some half dozen of his followers, covered with the green branches which betokened submission. At that sight she faltered and, with a cry of despair, flung herself into his arms.

The signal to clear the house followed and two hundred women and children in it were taken captive. More French troops had arrived, who formed a guard and then began the dreary march of the prisoners, up the winding paths of the steep valley to Tamesguida, where they arrived at nightfall. All were on foot save Lélla Fathma, who rode on her mule, with her brother walking beside her.

The little drama of Tirouda was nearly played out.

Next day the *M'rabta* was brought before the French Marshall. Her pride and her courage had not deserted her, though hope was gone.

When he asked her why her people had broken their covenant and fired on the French troops, she replied: —

"It was the Will of Allah! It is neither your fault, nor mine! Your soldiers broke their ranks to force their way into my village. My men defended themselves. I am your prisoner. I attach no blame to you: you have nothing to reproach me with. *It was written.*" [3]

[3] Récits de Kabylie by E. Carrey.

CHAPTER XXIV

ESSENCE OF ROSES

"The deep red of the ruby and the perfume of roses awaken joy." ARAB SAYING.

IN her dark stuffy little hut, shut into a square court enclosed by grey-brown walls of mud and stone, joined at one side by high gates, through which she might not pass, Zoowahra languished in idle weariness and discontent, pining for the freedom which had once been hers. Like other girls of the village, she had run about in barefooted, unveiled liberty all her younger days and even supposing the food supply in her poor home ran short at times; even if she were obliged to carry heavy jars of water up the long winding ascent from the fountain, it had been in company with merry comrades, healthy little animals, happy just to live in the brilliant sunshine and clear air.

Suddenly came a great change. When barely fifteen she married and, unlike most wives in Kabylie, she was hidden away. Her husband, Amalou, was greatly enamoured, and furiously jealous, of the pretty, slim creature he had first seen dance by the light of the moon, not a twelvemonth since, at a fête of Ramadhane. She had bewitched him with

the swirl of crimson draperies, with the soft glances of her languorous eyes and the grace of her lithe young form; and, being swarthy himself, by the paleness of her waxen skin. She was not a maiden of his *Soff* and it was pure chance that made him obey the call of the tomtoms and flutes at the foot of the hill and first linger at the back of a little crowd of men, then push his way through as soon as Zoowahra began to dance.

Amalou was head waiter at the French hotel which fronted a white stone, tree shaded terrace posed just above a road that had broken in half the slope of another great hill, not two miles away. He was able to pay well for his choice, being rich, as riches are accounted in the poor little hamlet where Zoowahra was born, and when he had sent his message of admiration and compliment, "How well her *fouta* became her," negotiations for her purchase proceeded apace. The money he earned and his frequent tips enabled him to keep her in idleness with an old woman, Aïcha, who was at once guardian and servant to the pretty young wife.

The marriage had taken place late in September and all through the winter Amalou had proved himself a most devoted lover and husband, who delighted in decking his bride with barbaric ornaments and gay silk *foutas* to keep alight in himself the flame of desire, as every good Mussulman should.

Throughout the cold months he was practically free to come and go as he pleased, for keen icy blasts swept down from the mountains and snow ten-

A Winter Scene in Kabyle

derly covered the broken boughs, which the women had mutilated in summer to give food to their starving beasts. A white pall lay thick on the roadway, the little hotel stood empty of guests and hardly a day passed but Amalou climbed the perpendicular cliff behind it and sped over the further side to visit his prisoner and wife. He took a short cut to the rear of the village, climbed the back wall of his little demesne and announced his presence as he sprang into the courtyard.

Thus time had passed swiftly enough for Zoowahra and she scarcely missed the companions of her girlhood, whom, now, she never saw. Having married into another *Soff,* she was as far removed from her own kindred as if her parents had sent her to Taourit-Mimoum, to Kou-kou, to Tirouda, or any other village of Sahel, which she did not know even by name. The rare visitors of her own sex, who came to see her, she patronized, feeling herself immensely superior to these other women, who were hewers of wood and drawers of water, and she enjoyed the social prestige of being idle and hidden away.

When Spring came, however, the long unwonted confinement began to tell upon her health. She grew thinner; her cheeks were pale under the saffron-tinted rouge and her *koh'eul* rimmed eyes seemed to fill two-thirds of the little white face bedaubed with colour. She longed, half unconsciously, for the soft caressing breeze which blew outside in the open bare spaces, and for the fulness

of the sunshine, which never seemed wholly to illumine the closed-in court beyond her dark windowless cage.

Spring too brought wealthy tourists, English and American, to the Hotel, who stayed awhile to gaze admiringly, from the shaded verandah straight across at the beautiful snowcapped Djurdjura mountains and at the pretty brown villages lying between, which rose afresh every day out of a cold grey sea of heavy morning mist. Private cars arrived at any and all times, so that Amalou was tied by his work and the hope of rewards for his quick and willing service: in consequence, his visits to his home grew more rare.

From time to time his thoughts flew over the ground his feet could not traverse, but at last he grew too busy even to think.

As the snow melted away from Lélla Khadidja [1] and the sun tinted the towering peak with delicious warm tints of violet and rose, other visitors came by the big automobile which makes its winding spiral ascent daily from Tizi-Ouzow. That drive, in itself, is a long dream of beauty, with the market town visible again and again, as each twisted stair of the mountains is rounded until the houses growing smaller and smaller, are at last quite lost to sight. The newcomers had been thankful to leave the capital of Great Kabylie, set down at the bottom of a bowl and walled in by heated rocks; or they were escaping, pale and exhausted, from the moist, ener-

[1] The highest peak of the Djurdjura mountains.

vating air of Algiers, whilst others were fleeing from the sirocco which tried, and sometimes succeeded, in pursuing them all the long journey through from the South. Every room in the inn was occupied for days, weeks, even months together. Amalou worked from early dawn to midnight and in August, making life still harder for a pious Mussulman, began the Fast of *Ramadhane*.

Extremes of any kind are usually bad, being unbalanced, and it is curious to notice how extremes of an opposite nature are apt to bring about an identical result. In this instance, the husband, who worked overmuch, and the wife, who was not permitted to work at all, both developed nerves and an irritability of temper which, when they did meet, provoked quarrels. Each had a grievance. Zoowahra felt herself neglected and became resentful of her prolonged seclusion. Amalou noticed that her beauty was waning and ignorant, or utterly careless, of the fact that he was himself to blame for this, he reproached her with it, infuriating her the more, even if she dared not show her anger in his presence. The husband was too worn out physically and too impatient to see the defiance which was stirring within her and which, no doubt, would have surprised him, for most wives only trembled and wept when they could no longer please the tyrant of the home. Now and again there are exceptions amongst these hill women for Kabylie, in the past, was a favourite refuge for rebellious spirits, who fled to the mountain fastnesses and, remaining there,

transmitted their hot untamed blood to their descendants.

Zoowahra may have had some such ancestor, for she cherished her anger and gave vent to it when she and Aïcha found themselves once more alone.

There was a vague sort of kinship between Amalou and the withered, wrinkled old crone he had placed in charge of his wife. Though perhaps hardly forty years had passed over Aïcha's head, Kabylie life and Kabylie customs had aged her beyond recognition; beyond trace of the good looks which had once notably been hers.

Her scraggy, bare, yellow throat was tatooed with a blue black necklace, a band and pendant chains, to hide the goître which had attacked her and which, in its first stages, the irritant pricking of needle and powder have been known to effectually cure, or, at least, to partially conceal.

In the scenes enacted before her blinking, but yet wide awake eyes, Aïcha saw her own early married life reflected, as in a mirror, when she had lived in her husband's hut on the confines of the French village. Yet she had been freer than Zoowahra. How else could the Spahi have marked her for his own: the dashing Red Cavalier, who lounged outside the Bureau, or rode down the street on his fine prancing charger? Her bent shoulders straightened and a new light flickered in the sunken tired eyes as she recalled the first day she had seen him and he had swung himself off his horse, not far from

the stone fountain where she stood in her striped red and yellow petticoat, with a still empty jar poised on her head. Men are strictly forbidden to linger near rivers, or wherever pitchers are filled, but if a stone suddenly lodged in the hoof of his mount, how could he help it?

She had resisted at first, for she liked her husband well enough, though he beat her often as a sign of his affection, but the Cavalier in the red *burnous* had a wheedling way with women and he found a ready go-between in Aïcha's old aunt, who brought messages and an amulet to guard her from harm. She cherished it still in its beautifully embroidered leather case, hung by a faded yellow cord round her neck, with the writing inside, "the verses of protection," [2] which she had never seen, but which had successfully screened her and her lover. He had ridden away for good one day, the handsome Spahi, on his curvetting steed and Aïcha had seen him no more, but she had never forgotten. After that episode life became very drear to her: the little son had died: the husband neglected her and took a younger wife into the home. Aïcha had toil for her portion, little shelter, not much food. Then her husband died and Amalou offered to make her his wife's servant and jailor. The old woman accepted thankfully and endured the girl's ill-temper with the patience born of long hardship; but, at length, when Zoowahra grew more fretful and sul-

[2] From the Koran.

len, she looked about for some means of contenting her charge.

. . . . . .

Before many days had passed "Fate, Luck, the Long Arm of Coincidence, or the Devil" came to Aïcha's aid and sent Saït ben-Amoqran up the ascent to Aït Itichem. She knew him well, had watched him grow from boyhood into manhood, his father being akin to her husband; but it was many months, perhaps a year or more since she had looked on his handsome face. Here was diversion for Zoowahra! A pedlar, by reason of his trade, might approach where no other man dared be seen. With his sack as sufficient extenuation of his presence, he was at liberty to crouch down on the threshold of a hut and there display his wares to the chattering, eager women standing just within the door.

Saït had come up to Michelet for the Tuesday market and had intended to pass by the poor little hamlet and take the high road, which lay beneath it, to the rich village of Taka, but his goal was still some miles off; it was later in the day than he had thought; sunset was approaching, when he might drink, and the sirocco had parched his throat till it felt all afire. He decided to try his luck at the hamlet and either exchange a few of his samples for coffee and food, or cajole some woman into giving him a meal for nothing. This happened more often than not in his wanderings and many a pretty Bedouine had fallen a victim to his persuasive tongue

and fine bearing. He had inherited his good looks from his mother, who belonged to the tribe of Aït-Ouaguennoun, famed for its beautiful daughters. Their loveliness was due, said tradition, to the strain of foreign blood introduced by the dare-devil European pirates who had mated and left descendants along the shores of the purple sea. The roving spirit was reborn in Saït and he had been well content to follow his father's trade, for he loved adventure and travel. He had gone away south, then to Tunis and had followed the coast line back to Kabylie, buying up samples of medicines and cosmetics at the ports. Now he was well provided with everything a hill woman could possibly want, in his little phials and boxes. When foreheads were low he would offer yellow arsenic and green soap to make an ointment warranted to kill the roots of the hair and heighten the brow: when tresses, eyebrows and lashes were too fair he had oak apple and *hadida* to dye them. There was *koh'eul,* and to spare, for the little reed cases which hang, half concealed, in the folds of gay muslin draperies; *henneh* for pretty palms and long supple fingers; rouge, rolled in odorant powder and sweet scents from the City of Perfumes.

With his stock in trade over his shoulder Saït climbed the hill track which led into the village. There by the fountain he met old Aïcha with a shining petrol tin on her head, and immediately knew his supper was assured. He followed her into the little courtyard, seated himself on his heels by the

doorstep of the hut patiently awaiting the descent of the sun, whilst Aïcha busied herself with her cooking pots and Zoowahra delightedly turned over his wares. Meanwhile he watched the girl and the sight of her pleased him overmuch, for excitement had driven away her languor, lent brilliance to her eyes: a red flush stained her cheeks and she was good to look upon.

At first, to do her justice, the young wife hardly thought of, or looked at the pedlar, so occupied was she with the finery and stray assortment of treasures he had spread out at her feet. As good fortune would have it English tourists had lately come to visit the village and she had sold them some of her trinkets at a very high price.

After much hesitation Zoowahra chose a *mendil* of a rich ruby red and some musk; then, with a little scream of delight, she discovered a phial of attar of rose. Saït ben-Amoqran was on his feet in a moment and, looking up, she met his eyes and caught his low whisper. She put her hands quickly over her face, jerked her chin upwards and, backing into the hut, closed the door on him.

The pedlar laughed softly and somewhat derisively, then busied himself putting his wares into his sack by the dim light of the fast dying day. When Aïcha appeared with his coffee, he drank it thirstily, took a round cake of bread from her and giving her some ointment for rheumatic joints, shouldered his goods and was gone. The red *mendil* and the perfume lay on the step and when Aïcha's half blind old

eyes saw them, she chuckled. Saït would come back.

Next day found him at the hut again sure enough and the next. He lingered about the village determined to hunt down his quarry. Zoowahra at first half hid herself from him, but he caught glimpses of downcast eyes, an aquiline nose, of a profile framed in ruby silk, whilst the odour of roses pervaded the still hot air. He summoned Aïcha to his aid and she, recalling memories of her own youth and with the love of intrigue strong within her, played upon the girl with sure fingers as on some rude instrument with but few strings and chords. She even went so far — Saït having bent her tuneless self to his fancy — as to offer Zoowahra her wonderful amulet, with its verses of protection, to shield them both from the husband, who was certainly neglecting her sadly. Husbands were all alike! No doubt, he had seen some pretty face that had charmed him; was thinking perhaps of marrying another wife, one who would give him a son.

As if to give the lie direct to her evil suggestions the unconscious Amalou paid them a most unexpected visit, but unluckily it did not tend to improve matters. The man was very worn out with work and fasting: had reeled with faintness as he waited at table from the smell of the food he dared not touch. One of the visitors had taxed him with rudeness, which if true had been unintentional, and when dinner was over and all traces of it had been re-

moved from off the wide terrace, the head waiter was so sick and tired that he practically demanded leave to go home.

So long was it since his jump into the courtyard and his call had been heard, that Amalou's arrival came as a shock to the two women in the hut. Aïcha made a desperate clutch at the silk kerchief which adorned Zoowahra's pretty little head, but her quick thought was unavailing, for the girl, in her agitation, dropped the phial, with which she had toyed endlessly since the first day that Saït had changed the even current of her life.

Bereft of her ruby *mendil* and watching the last drops of precious perfume as they oozed slowly over the stone *dokana* where she had been lying, all the joy that her treasures had kindled, died within her. When Amalou entered the hut his wife faced him with a look of evident surprise and fear.

. . . . . .

The last Friday of the weary month of abstinence found Saït ben-Amoqran in the early dawn driving a patient bourriquot before him, its back piled up with a little tent and his wares. He was on his way to the Souk [3]-el-Djemâa, the largest and most picturesque market of Great Kabylie, and all along the tracks of the surrounding hills were to be seen other *irâthen* [4] like himself with donkeys, mules, or camels, making their way slowly down the zigzag paths into the valley. Some had arrived overnight and had tethered their beasts close to the stream which

[3] Market. [4] Hawkers.

formed a boundary line on one side of the long rectangular ground taken up by the market, with apple orchards beyond the rippling, refreshing water. When Saït had made the long descent and found himself amongst the first comers they were already erecting their low canvas shelters and putting out their goods: gay cotton cloths; silk kerchiefs; trinkets and beads; cheap French articles; brooches and clasps made in Switzerland, or Italy; soaps and scents. Cutting the rectangle in half was a great gateway, like an immense triumphal arch, which seemed to have stood there through the ages and to have served some other purpose than merely to divide the groups of vendors. Beyond it there were food stuffs; grain was being measured, and meat and skins lay about in great piles. Camels were tethered to the trunks of trees which had evidently made a long journey from the far South, from Biskra and Touggourt even, where saddlebags and nosebags are so richly worked in reds and greens that they would not, in the form of cushions, disgrace a lady's boudoir.

The gathering on this occasion was unusually large: every available beast and vehicle had been requisitioned. At noon the *M'rabet* would preside at the Great Prayer of the last market of Ramadhane. Saït intended to be present and in company with hundreds of others to make his prostrations beneath the shade of the olive trees on a plateau above the river's bank. He had been very successful in his sales and it was time for him to be travel-

ling southward, but his sudden passion for Zoowahra stayed his steps and kept him among the mountains. The girl had become reckless now and defiant of her husband since that last interview which had been so stormy. Amalou's suspicions were at once aroused and his wrath had been terrible. He had beaten her; reproached her with being childless and without hope of a child; had threatened to murder any man who came near her. Saït of the handsome face and silver tongue shone by contrast in every way beside her dark, ill-favoured spouse. Amalou's threats made her shudder and remembering Aïcha's offer of the amulet she demanded it of her. The old woman was loth to part with her treasure, but Saït was generous and kind; her charge was no longer badtempered and she would get it back again, no doubt, she reflected, when the pedlar had gone. She thought Zoowahra wanted it to shield herself from Amalou's anger and heavy hand, but the girl was more fearful of harm to her lover, and when she got the charm, threw the frail yellow cord over his head and implored him to wear it. Saït had heard the story of the broken phial, and now that his morning's work was over he determined to find another and with it break down Zoowahra's last feeble show of resistance.

His search for the perfume must have taken longer than he thought and the bargaining with the hawker (who had brought wares from Tunis) was certainly a serious affair. When it was, at last,

successfully over and he had secured the precious essence, he noticed that the market had emptied of men. Hurriedly climbing the ascent to the plateau he met them coming away in groups from the olive grove. He was too late! He had missed the Great Prayer! Superstitious Kabyle that he was he took it as a bad omen; then felt at his side for Zoowahra's amulet and, pressing it against him, was comforted: for a while only. In the late afternoon, as he wended his way slowly back to Michelet, a crow flew on to the branch of a tree, just above his head, and other birds circled about him till he again felt himself menaced by some unknown danger. Was it to do with Zoowahra? He laughed as he thought of the number of times he had run the same risk and had always escaped misfortune, or hurt. There was the little M'Zabite, Faffa, whose husband was trading far away in Tell and who kept a shop herself for women only. There was Hadda of the soft wistful brown eyes and Khadidja and Zila, who had paid with her life. . . . He frowned. That was an unpleasant memory and had meant a close shave for himself, but after all, one woman more or less in the world, what did it matter? He was going to see Zoowahra, who was the prettiest of them all and to-day was the last of the Great Fast, Praise be to God!

It was late when he reached Michelet and the coffee shops were full of thirsty men. He stopped at the first, just beyond the fountain, stretched himself luxuriously on a mat outside the door, and spent

much time discussing prices and the luck of the day with his friends. Then he put up his beast at the *fondouk* [5] where he kept it and shouldering his sack prepared to move on to Aït Itichem. It must have been about an hour and a half after *mogh'reb* [6] that he started on his way unaccompanied, even by the blessings of his late companions, for the men loved not to see his handsome face in the neighbourhood of their womenfolk and were glad to get him gone. An ill reputation flies apace.

Avoiding the main road which makes a long détour past the French cemetery and bends round the hills, Saït walked on towards the hotel and took the track up the cliff, which begins almost within its precincts. There was no moon and the night was very dark. As he strode up the footpath his white *gandoura* and *burnous* were clearly visible amongst deep shadows. Saït was no coward and had travelled far by unfrequented routes, but now he had an uneasy feeling that he was being watched and the ill omens of the day clung persistently to his mind. The *djinns,* no doubt, were abroad and busy with some of their devilish work, so he hummed a song to keep them off him and stopped to readjust his sack over one shoulder, leaving his right arm free to wield his *met'rek* if the attack should prove human. Then he walked on more quickly round a bend which led past a grove of thickly planted trees.

He bethought him of the scent for Zoowahra and

[5] Stables for camels, mules, etc.

[6] About 8 o'clock.

still grasping his stick put his hand clumsily into the pocket of his *gandoura*. The phial was safe but, all unknown to him, he strained and broke the frayed yellow cord, from which dangled his amulet, so that the leather case slipped down and fell softly on a little pile of leaves. A rustling noise in the thicket at hand startled him and he turned to face it, just as a jagged stone thrown by an unerring hand struck him full on the temple. He fell like a log across the path and the same hand dragged his body slowly and very quietly in amongst the trees.

All that was left of Saït ben-Amoqran lay in the brushwood that night and even for some hours in the morning. Passers by seeing a figure wrapped closely in a *burnous* thought him asleep.

At last one from some impulse of curiosity, or perhaps of intuition, crept down to the body and, noting its stillness, turned it gently and saw that he had gone to his long account. The stick had fallen from his hand, but tightly grasped in the palm was a phial of attar of rose.

PART IV

IN CONSTANTINE

CHAPTER XXV

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ROME

"We stood on the place of their ruins, where nothing remained but the foundations of their walls. I wept until blood fell from my eyes; where so many men once dwelt, now you found but the end. My eyes since then are ruined, for the sight of such faded grandeur has made a waste of my heart."

September, 1913.

IN Michelet the great heat of the day time was gradually dying off, and the nights, always chilly, grew really cold. Dinners were served within doors more often than on the terrace: people were returning to warmer climes and to their own homes. It was time for me to leave also and my best route lay via the beautiful Col de Tirouda to Maillot, which is built on a step of the highest peak of Djurdjura. Hundreds of Kabyles pass through the pretty French village in the summer, choosing seven Thursdays for their pilgrimage to the top of the mountain, where lies enshrined Lélla Khadidja, from whom it takes its name. She was a prophetess and *M'rabta,* widow of the Grand Master of an Order founded by Kabylie's most famous saint, Sidi

Mohamed-ben-Abd-er-Rahman-Bou Kobreïn,[1] and, when her husband died, she became the actual, if not the nominal, head of a celebrated Zaouïa.

European tourists also go to Maillot to climb the peak, that they may gaze over the whole of the mountainous region of Great Kabylie, the chief ranges of Little Kabylie, the valley and villages of Sahel; but the excursion takes only one day, or two at most, and there is nothing else to detain sight-seers, so they rush on by road, or take the train, westward to Algiers, or northeast to Bougie, or again, southeast to Sétif. Maillot, consequently, has seen its best days, before those of rapid transit: place, people and country are impoverished, lacking energy and heart.

My next destination was the greatest possible contrast! Sétif possesses no natural beauties to recommend it; but, on the other hand, it has, not only the necessaries, but also the luxuries of civilised life; electric light, sanitation, baths. Between it and Les Portes de Fer, the first station in Constantine, lies one of the granaries of Algeria and the inhabitants are said to be rolling in riches.

There has grown up, therefore, on the site of the old Roman Sitifis, a great commercial centre, increasing, by leaps and bounds, in wealth, in size and in importance. Judging by its buildings Sétif might be a large prosperous provincial town of

[1] "The man with two tombs" whose body, duplicated after death, lies amongst his own tribe of Aït-Smâïl and was also buried in great pomp at the Hamma, Algiers.

France, but it is redeemed in picturesqueness by its Arab population. The Constantinois have the reputation of being great dandies and though subsequently I did not find this to be the case in the capital of the Department, it is absolutely true at Sétif.

In the evenings after dinner, it was a delight to watch the shifting groups of men clad in the snowiest of robes, parading up and down the wide chief streets in twos and threes and gathering round the fountain in the Place Nationale. Few gay colours here as at the Place of Happiness, but mysterious figures clad entirely in white, their faces framed and hooded, passing into the light cast by the lamps of streets and shops, then vanishing into the shadows of high houses, round corners, or into some dark interior. They are carpet and mat manufacturers, grain merchants and horse dealers, who are revivifying a country that long lay dead over great cities buried in the earth and their grandeur gone for ever.

Hitherto, in my wanderings, I had not come upon remains of ancient Roman days in Africa, but in the Jardin d'Orléans at Sétif there are many altars, columns, and tombstones; on the Roman road to Bougie is a mausoleum, popularly known as the Tombeau de Scipion and, within easy reach, are the ruins of Djemila. This was the place to see, not the poor little Berber village with its huts paved with mosaics, but the Roman Cuicul from whence the inlay had been ruthlessly stolen, and which is now being excavated twenty-five miles distant from Sétif.

On a cloudy morning, with a cool breeze blowing, I started in the lightest motor car obtainable for a lofty plateau, 19 miles north of the French village of St. Arnaud. The drive was indescribably dreary, along a deserted winding road which had not yet been peppered with the danger signals of the Automobile Club of France (though there was need of them) and the last seven miles of which could hardly be called a road at all. The whole time I was journeying through a region, quite barren to all appearance and uninhabited save for a few isolated farms. Here and there a solitary figure was at work on land that was too hard and dry to reward his efforts: the autumn rains were late. The undulating country was a dull brown shade, almost without relief, save for the stubble, which was still strewn over it, the last sign and remnants of a harvest all gathered in. But here was the keynote of the vision that I had, of green blades waving in the light spring breezes of April; of stems, a pale yellow in May; and the golden glory of full wheat ears bowed down by their own weight in the early tropical summer. Those are the months in which to visit Sétif and to see the country at its best around Sillègue. The river, which for the most part runs underground in its fertilising course, has been rightly christened by the Arabs "River of Gold." It may be so called for the yellow gold of the wheat, or for the red gold, cast from the furnace, that North African corn fetches in the grain markets of Paris and France.

In September, alas! the land had been shorn of its glory: the whole country side looked a dreary waste and outside the corn growing region lay a mountainous district, bleak, bare and desolate all the year round.

This wind-swept, cheerless plateau was the scene of a tragedy, of lost endeavour; one of the supreme tragedies of the ages, for it had been amongst the fair, populous places of the civilised world. In the 1st or 2nd century, these mountains had looked down upon a Roman city, wherein 40,000 men and women had lived out the span of their little lives and had raised fine buildings to defy Time and Nature, in so far as human beings can. A great gate, 40 ft. high, gave entrance on the west side: beyond was a Temple; a Christian church with a monastery attached; innumerable houses. Its citizens had gathered in a Forum to listen to their leaders and orators and to hear of great events in Italy and the affairs of this colony of Ancient Rome. They built themselves an immense theatre, large enough to seat the entire population, and crowded into it to witness feats of strength and daring.

What happened? A devastating fire raged in their beautiful city; hordes of barbarians wrecked and despoiled it; finally, Nature piled up mounds of earth, as on a tomb, and hid it from the world for hundreds of years.

There is left now — an outline; great columns; a few buildings, partially restored; wonderful pavements, pieced together and housed in a Museum;

hooks that once hung in a butcher's shop; a measure for cloth and for grain; some little household gods.

Ruins as memorials: I " found but the end."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE ENCHANTED PALACE OF HADJ-AHMED

" Figurez-vous une délicieuse décoration d'opéra, tout de marbre blanc et de peintures aux couleurs les plus vives, d'un gout charmant, des eaux coulant de fontaines ombragées d'orangers, de myrtes, enfin un rêve des milles et une nuit." H. VERNET.

EARLY on the morning of the 24th of September I found myself at the entrance of the station at Constantine, waiting for the hotel bus and quite content to gaze upwards for a while at the strange, beautiful oriental city above me, bathed in an eastern glow. Strange, because of its great elevation and apparently impregnable position on a long, narrow, cruelly jagged rock, which just escapes being an island, with the " fantastic river Rhumel," washing that terrible ravine at a depth of nearly a thousand feet. Strange too, and most interesting on account of the diversity of its buildings.

Far away on the right, the white civil hospital, with its two large domes, first catches the eye. A suspension bridge, that is a triumph of engineering, spanning the gorge 600 ft. above its base, connects it with the north end of the town where the Kasba, successively Phœnician, Roman, Byzantine, Ber-

ber, Arab, Turkish and French, naturally dominates everything else in its vicinity. On a line, more or less, with Fort and barracks are houses, too obviously European and modern to arouse any interest: only the new *Medersa,*[1] built in the Turkish-Moorish style, awakens curiosity as to its purpose — if not admiration. It stands in the middle distance and commands the Arab Quarter where dwell 30,000 Mussulman souls and where, for the traveller, lies the great charm of Constantine. The houses, of course, are closely packed together, gleaming white in the sunshine, with here and there azure walls and courts that might have been coloured by a laundress's blue bag. It was a fascinating vision, suggestive of all sorts of possibilities in store, and soon I was rattling up stony, narrow, hilly streets at the back of the Arab town and was set down at an hotel in the rue Caraman.

Apart from the few days I had spent at Sétif, I had been quite away from the region of banks and all such accommodating luxuries of civilisation for many months, so it was no wonder that my supply of ready money was exhausted. My last franc had just been bestowed on the luggage porter and here I was, at a strange hotel in a foreign city, with only a few sous at the bottom of my hand bag. Positively my first visit, and at once, must be to the Crédit Lyonnais.

"Where was it?"

"In the Place du Palais, quite close at hand."

[1] Mussulman College.

Kindly lent by Mrs. Mathews

Constantine. The Arab Quarter

Following further instructions I turned to my right and walked on until I saw the Cathedral, on the opposite side of the road, with its great entrance doors opening southwards into a small paved court and, abutting on the façade, a long flight of stone steps.

Mounting these brought me into a very modern-looking square with three other narrow exits, one south and two westwards, and nearly in its centre, a big bandstand. This was the Place du Palais, where my business was quickly transacted. Feeling relieved to be provided with the needful, and able to meet any unforeseen emergency, I retraced my steps more slowly, looking about me like a country cousin.

The whole of the north side of the Square was shut in by a large irregular building with wide, shallow, stone steps, in front of which a sentry paced slowly to and fro. I asked a gendarme at the corner of the lane what it was, and his answer surprised me not a little.— "The Palace of Hadj-Ahmed."

That ugly dull-looking barrack! Was that the residence of which the last Bey had been so inordinately proud? He even went so far as to throw open its doors for a great fête, once and once only, when it was finished, that all the little world of Constantine might come to gape and marvel at its wonders. Perhaps he would hardly recognise it himself now, with its hideous modern chimneys, rising above at least two-thirds of the rectangular block, which jutted out beyond the entrance at the side.

This latter alone and the quaint balcony above it, wore an old-world look: their glory had departed: they lay in deep shadow.

With a feeling of disappointment I turned my back on the Palace disdainfully; descended the steps again and wandered into Notre Dame des Sept Douleurs just below, which in the time of the Beys had been the Market Mosque, El-Djemmâ Souk er-Rezel.

Here again, one civilisation succeeding another had altered all the face of things: the western intolerance of over seventy years ago and western ingenuity had adapted the Temple of one form of belief to suit the uses of another creed. In the women's galleries, along the south wall, was an organ: facing it a choir had been built and an altar raised to the God of the Victors. The *mihrâb* was filled with a lifesize figure of the Christ; the *mimbar* was now a pulpit; superimposed on the dainty inlay of brightly coloured stucco, which covered some of the walls like mosaic, were pictures of the Stations of the Cross. The whole effect was crude and bizarre to a degree, recalling vividly portions of El-Hadj Aïssa's prophecy of the fate of Algiers, which seemed equally true of this Temple.

"Woe to thy masters:
To-day thou art as if they had never possessed thee:
Thou art become the abode of the Christians:
They have driven out the Faith and its defenders.
. . . . . .
Such is the Will of God! Praise be unto Him!"

Suddenly concluding that I was too hungry and tired to enjoy sights, I walked straight through the Cathedral, out into the street and back to the hotel. After breakfast I darkened my room and lay down for a siesta.

. . . . . .

Some hours must have passed while I slept for the afternoon seemed to be closing in when, feeling thoroughly refreshed and fit, I resolved to try my luck again. Where should I go? I thought of the Palace with some distaste, but as I certainly could not leave Constantine without "doing" it, I might just as well get my task over and leave the rest of my days for that fascinating blue and white city which covers the lower part of the rock, running right down one side of it nearly to the Rhumel.

Besides, there must be something interesting inside that ugly barrack. Hadj-Ahmed had ransacked the houses of his subjects and commandeered their choicest treasures: he took from them marble columns, tiles, windows. Salah Bey's house was despoiled of its beautiful things: a wonderful carved door had been carried away bodily. The Jews of Tunis supplied glass and sent their best workmen to fit it. A workman, El-Hadj Joussef, who had been employed in the restoration of the Roman bridge by Salah Bey, offered his services to paint the walls with pictures [2] of the towns he had visited

[2] The story told of the French slave has been specially invented for tourists.

during a pilgrimage to Mecca. The forests of Kabylie and the Aurès mountains furnished cedar wood. A Genoese was commanded to bring marbles from Italy. When they arrived at Bône, the whole population turned out to help the convoys, that the precious burdens of the mules and camels might not be damaged, so great was their fear of the Bey's anger and his awful punishments. The terrible Turk built his Palace by the spell, the suasion of his cruelty and power. It had arisen as if by magic and the people soon began to regard it with superstitious awe. It was guarded by celestial powers, they said. It was enchanted! Of course I must see it.

The sun had set; there was a chilly wind so I wrapped myself in the long travelling cloak (which Lisette's models at The Place of Happiness had christened my "*burnous*") and put on my toque with a motor veil. When passing the pier glass it occurred to me that I really looked very like the women of Constantine who wear long blue or black nunlike habits in the street and are always muffled up to their eyes.

It is extraordinary in Algeria what a difference the sunlight makes in every place, but I was not prepared for quite such a change as I found outside: it was bewildering. As a result I walked on too far and, missing the steps, found myself at the further end of Notre Dame des Sept Douleurs. Even that looked altered. I had an idea that a cross had stood rather prominently above the gateway by which I left the church in the morning, but there

was none to be seen now and there were several Arabs hanging about, which was also odd. A road wound round, in the right direction at all events, so that, probably, I need not turn back, and I asked one of the loiterers in French if it led to the Palace. He looked at me in a queer sort of way, as if he did not understand and murmured something that sounded like Zekak-el-Blâte,[3] but when I pointed up the ascent saying in a questioning tone "Palais d'el Hadj-Ahmed?" he nodded and replied, "Ja, Dar-el-Bey" (Yes, the house of the Bey), so I walked on.

A little way up the road it was quite evident that I had only overshot my mark by a turning, or so, for I found myself at the back of the Palace, where there were two entrances: the first a large gate and, a few paces beyond it, a painted, highly ornamented door, at the top of a few steps, which probably opened into private apartments. After a moment's hesitation I decided to knock at the gate.

It opened at once — rather suddenly in fact — and I was startled at being confronted by a huge man in a uniform, which seemed oddly familiar, though I certainly had not come across it before during my stay in Algeria. A very long coat reaching below the knees was worn over the full Turkish trousers,* embroidered vest and sash. His turban was immense, of an Eastern fashion, unlike an Arab's, and he was armed with a scimitar. Judging

[3] This was the former name of the street where the rue Caraman now is.

by the man's manner he might have been expecting me, so quickly and without question had he let me in and closed the heavy door behind me. Not a muscle moved in his impassive countenance, though he might reasonably have been astonished at my appearance, so late in the afternoon and at the back gate.

My mind was quickly diverted from the Mamelouk, however, by my surroundings which were as surprising as they were beautiful. Facing me was a bath which must have been planned for syrens or nymphs. It was an immense square basin of white marble in which red fish were swimming slowly about, or darting to and fro. In the centre a fountain supported by dolphins sent up jets of water high into the air to fall again like cascades and be received in vast cups, of varying size, placed one above the other and adorned with leaves and foliage exquisitely carved. A light, moveable, wooden bridge, like a gigantic toy, connected the bath with galleries running all round it to form a square court. They were raised just a step above its level, paved with marble and the walls tiled half way up with quaint old-fashioned plaques. Above them was a ribbon decoration painted in relief on a warm red background and crude pictures of towns and ports, such as no man ever saw, save the artist in his own mind's eye.

A flight of steps at hand led down to vapour baths, dressing and resting rooms and in one of these there was actually an aviary of canaries and nightin-

gales to sing to the bathers and wile away the idle hours.

Just as I reached the top of the stairs on my return from this exploration, a voice called out suddenly:

"Oh! there you are! Seliman came to tell me you were here and we could not find you." Then, in louder, angrier, tones: "What do you mean by going downstairs alone? You should have waited till I came to fetch you. How dare you! How dare you!"

Turning in the direction of the sound, I saw a most picturesque figure coming down a marble staircase on the right of the entrance, whilst Seliman respectfully held open a carved and glass panelled door which had hidden it from view.

"What do you mean by not waiting?" the speaker screamed at me, like a little fury, stamping her foot and working herself up into a passion whilst I gazed at her in mute astonishment. She was quite a young girl, with brilliant dark eyes and scarlet lips which had rather a cruel look caused, perhaps, by her wrath. Accustomed though I had become to see women in strange and showy raiment, this girl's dress seemed especially fantastic and costly. It was glittering with sequins and jewels and the little Turkish cap, set so coquettishly on her head, was richly wrought with gold and gems. Who could she be and who in the world did she imagine I was?

Then in quieter tones, but pouting and half crying, like a spoiled baby, she continued:

"You might have waited: I did so want to show you everything myself."

Then she and the big guard, she called Seliman, were expecting a guest! Still, if she proposed to show me over the Palace, I was not going to make it my business to point out that they had made a mistake in admitting me. The chance was too good a one to lose, so I said humbly:

"I am so very sorry, but I was left all alone without any instructions and did not know where to go, or what to do, and everything was so lovely and so unusual all round me."

"Well! Well!" she said, mollified evidently by my contrition and my warm praise, "Never mind!" Then, very graciously, "I'll forgive you this time and show you much more beautiful places than this. Perhaps we had better not go to my father's apartments, until he is at Dar Oum-en-Noun. He has supper there at five o'clock every evening as" . . . she hesitated; a shade passed over her face. . . . "It is safer if he only eats what is given to him by my grandmother, or her eunuch Merzoug. Besides his wives live there as well as El-Hadja Rekia, his mother: it is the old Palace in which my father was born and this part we are in is all new, built by him quite lately."

As she was speaking a light broke in upon me. This must be Fathma, the daughter of the Great Bey: his very spoiled and petted little girl, whose word (after his own) was law throughout the Palace. I should have to mind my P's and Q's and I

began to wonder what would happen if she discovered me to be a fraud and not the visitor she was expecting.

"Of course," she went on volubly, "a lot of houses belonging to other people had to be pulled down and some of them made oh! such a fuss! Instead of giving them up at once to my father!" (this with great indignation).

"There was one old woman, who would not go out of her room at all. So, what do you think happened? My father was too clever for her. He said: 'Let her stay!' and he had her locked in and each day there was a little less light and a little less air and a little less food. So at last she screamed and begged to be let out and they took her away to Kabylie and she's dead. Ha! ha! ha!" She laughed heartily, evidently thinking it a huge joke.

"Come upstairs now and see my room and all the beautiful things my father commanded Seliman to bring me from Europe. You never can have seen anything like them and there are heaps and heaps."

She ran up ahead and I followed, with some misgivings which, however, were outweighed by my curiosity, though I had hardly time to see the first apartments through which my hostess led me at top speed. In one of them two little boys were playing together.

"That is Mahomed Chérif and that is Mahmoud," said Fathma, pointing to each child in turn. "They are my father's sons and live in these rooms with

their mother, Fathma bent bou Harara. No! no! don't stop!" as I arrested my steps for a second, "We haven't too much time if you want to see the palace. Here's my room!" and she pushed open a door painted in the most vivid hues and panelled with glass, pulled me inside and shut it.

It was charming. A spacious apartment the ceiling of which was supported by three slender marble pillars, between which hung candelabras of gilt and crystal. The floor, and the walls for a few feet, were tiled and above the plaques was a plaster decoration in the brightest possible colours. There was the usual alcove and very little furnishing, as in most Eastern rooms, except some painted coffers, out of which Fathma began to pull musical boxes, toys of all sort and description and mirrors of every shape, size and kind. She obviously expected me to be very much impressed and I acted immense astonishment to the best of my ability, but I was really much more interested in an enormous bronze egg cup in which was an ostrich egg. It was suspended and had three branches for candles.

"Do tell me about that ornament," I pleaded, "I am sure it is for something special."

Fathma looked up with a frown. "Oh, that!" she said impatiently. "It's filled with candles and lighted for Mouloud,[4] the birthday of the Prophet. You might have known that yourself."

Then she bundled her treasures back again and said crossly, "I don't believe you like my things,

[4] A great festival.

although you pretend to. I won't show you any more. You shan't see my little carriage either, drawn by two great big bulldogs that Seliman brought me." This was meant as a punishment for my inattention, but all of a sudden another idea took hold of her childish irresponsible mind and she went off into a fit of laughter.

"If you could only see old Ben-Aïssa [5] in it," she said, "or the Khalifa Hamelaoui, you'd never forget it! When my father is dull and wants some fun, he sends for my carriage and he makes one or other of them get in and drive about. They do hate it so, especially the Khalifa. He is very old and dignified and he looks so miserable when my father very politely asks him if he will take a little drive. He tries to refuse, of course. It is killingly funny. In he has to get and he holds on with both hands and my father has the dogs whipped till they rush over everything and the carriage rocks to and fro and is in danger of being upset. My father laughs and laughs till he nearly rolls off his seat. . . . I believe that's the lanterns!" as shafts of light flashed suddenly into the room, reflected by the glass lined cedar wood shutters. "If they're lighting up the Palace, it must be getting very late. Go out on the balcony and look."

I obeyed hastily and passed through the window on to a small belvedere, which overhung a beautiful garden filled with plants growing in rich tropical profusion. It was surrounded by covered galleries

[5] The Bey's prime minister.

where figures were moving about with lights. A man, with a face as black as my boots, was busily engaged in hanging lanterns from every arch between the marble pillars, taking them from a little troop of negresses, whose business it was, no doubt, to clean and fill them. It was such a fantastic, weird scene that I became absorbed in watching it and quite forgot my hostess, until she gave me a tug, which nearly landed me on my back. "Come along," she said, "the other garden is much the prettiest and it is always lit up first to be quite ready for my father."

She thereupon hurried me through some more apartments and down another flight of stairs into a veritable fairyland.

Here again were cloistered galleries and arcades, simple and most wonderfully elegant and light, surrounding a garden filled with orange and myrtle, citron and fig trees. Trailing vines grew about them: their tendrils reaching out caught at the arches and twined themselves closely round the slender marble pillars. The ceilings coloured green, red and yellow, lit up by innumerable lamps reflected their vivid tints upon the pure whiteness of the marble floor. There were several doors, like and yet unlike that by which we had just entered. One was of cedar wood panels, relieved by arabesques: another was of oak, ornamented with raised squares and lozenges, set within circles and brightly coloured. In this enchanted Palace no two things of any kind were exactly similar. The beautiful mar-

ble pillars were of the greatest possible diversity representing every known style; Ionic, Tuscan, Greco-Byzantine, Composite: yet, strange to say, they were so well disposed that, as regards the general effect, all was in harmony. I faced three ranks of columns, supporting an equal number of arcades and thus forming three naves, which stretched out before the heart and centre of this curious Arab building, the Pavilion of the Great Bey.

Fathma, for a wonder, was silent and let me gaze my fill without interruption. She seemed to be listening intently and presently opened a door, the entrance to another staircase and waited inside it for a time.

"That leads to Dar Oum-en-Noun," she said, closing it very gently, "where my father is just now. Come quickly! Follow me!"

In another moment we had sped down the gallery and stood within two massive, high green doors in an immense, oblong apartment with marble columns disposed at intervals throughout its length, for the support of five arcades. The walls were almost entirely covered with pictures: any blank spaces between them were filled up with squares of porcelain. There was very little furniture: some rich Eastern rugs on the floor; a few boxes, ornamented with nail heads, to hold papers or books; a couple of round tables where food might be served and some weapons, richly inlaid; but there was a large alcove with tiny windows and colonnettes where the Bey sat, à la

Turque, in the day time, so Fathma informed me. Now two or three negresses were arranging mattresses, pillows, and coverlets in it for the night and busying themselves about the apartment.

The Pavilion had twelve windows! This struck me as most curious, until I realised that the Bey's kiosk was also his watch tower. It was in a central position: it was also isolated from the rest of the buildings and standing between the two beautiful gardens, so that its owner could look into every court and see at a glance what was taking place in each. I mentioned this discovery to Fathma and she laughed again: her little cruel laugh, which I was learning to dread.

"He saw a woman plucking an orange one day, so he had her hand nailed to the tree," she said. "On another occasion some of the women were playing a game at imitating my father and one pretended to be the Bey. He watched them all the time, without their knowing it."

"What happened?" I asked. "What did he do?"

"He had the tongue cut out of the one who spoke and the eyes put out of those who looked on. Since then each woman lives in her own apartment and has no communication with the others unless my father is present," said Fathma, slowly, with her brilliant eyes fixed on my face, to watch the effect of her words.

"Oh!" I ejaculated feebly.

My hostess drew herself up to her full height.

"No one," she said, clenching her slender hands: "No one dare insult my father, or me. . . .

"Do you know what has just happened?" she went on hurriedly. Then, without waiting for an answer. "My father had arranged for my marriage with a man he had befriended and had chosen to be my husband, El-Hadj Husseïn Turki. What do I care? I had never seen him, but he was a fool and worse than a fool for he had let a young widow Zohra bewitch him and my father found it out. It was an insult to me: to my father's daughter. He has had to pay for being a fool: perchance there is more to come. Already Zohra is dead."

Fathma laughed showing her sharp white teeth and so like a little tigress did she look and as if she herself would have liked to spring upon and kill her unfortunate rival that, involuntarily, I recoiled from her in horror. Luckily she was too absorbed in her own story to notice this and demanded abruptly:

"Have you seen the Kaf Chekora?"

I shook my head, wondering what horrible thing it might be.

"Neither had I till yesterday," said she, "but then I had myself carried there. From the Palace we went towards the north, to the further end of the Kasbah, where there is an abyss and one can look deep, deep down, ever so far to the river. At the very edge there are three great stones, placed end to end like a bench about two yards long. It was there they took Zohra a few hours before. I had asked for the executioners to be with me, but they could

not come: my father had further need of them. They sent a man who had seen it all and who had accompanied them the previous night to the house of Zohra. Husseïn Turki was with her, but they tore her away and put her into a sack which one of the men carried over his shoulder. He said she struggled at first and then was very still.

"Perhaps she was dead already from the shock," I ventured to suggest.

Fathma turned on me a look of fury. "Dead! How dare you say so, or think so; she was meant to die a much worse death than that. Of course she did, too," she added as if reassuring herself. "Where was I? Don't interrupt! I know . . . she was in the sack and the other man was carrying a box made of three planks and open at both ends. When they arrived at the stones the man with the box put it down on the end of the middle one and the other man laid the sack on top. Then Zohra began to struggle and struggle again to get free and the sack began to slide slowly, slowly along till it reached the very end and fell plump into the abyss. I nearly tumbled over myself trying to see it."

I shuddered and could not forbear thinking that it would have been a good riddance if she had, when the big negro passed by the window, peering in and carrying a brass tray with coffee in his hands.

"My father has returned from Dar Oum-en-Noun," cried Fathma, with a new note in her voice. "He may perhaps come here and he would be furious if he saw you."

Seizing my hand she almost pulled me out of the room though I went most willingly, and pushed me into an obscure angle at the bottom of the gallery on the right hand, whilst she reconnoitred. The eunuch had left the door of his little cooking room open and I crouched behind it, with a beating heart, lest the awful Bey should come along and, finding me there, either torture me horribly or send me off in a sack after the unhappy Zohra.

The Palace had been very quiet hitherto, but now there seemed a good deal of stir and noise. However it was confined to the distance and nowhere in my immediate vicinity so I took courage to examine the beautiful door behind which I had taken shelter. Above its carved panels was an inscription which ran as follows: —

"In the Name of God, merciful and forgiving! Peace and happiness unto the master of this Palace; a life as prolonged as the tender cooing note of the dove; glory free from stain and joys unending till the day of resurrection."

A little oval ornament above had borne a date, which had been so clumsily effaced that the door told me its own story. This inscription was not written for El-Hadj-Ahmed but for Salah Bey, a *m'rabet,* whose home and descendants had been so cruelly robbed by his successor.

I was still staring at it and drawing my own conclusions when Fathma returned from spying out the land, but she waved me back imperiously into my corner, so that again I sank down into shadow.

As I did so the doors of a large square apartment immediately facing me were thrown open by an unseen hand and there issued from it a young negress gorgeously attired in scarlet, green and gold and more bejewelled than even my hostess herself. She shrank back at first on seeing Fathma, who completely ignored her and who, when the coloured girl had gone, turned to me with an expression on her face that made me feel questions would be a mistake.

"Fetouma, the slave!" she vouchsafed of her own accord, with the air and accents of a showman naming some loathsome creature despised by all the world.

She waited for a few moments, then laying her finger on her lips to enjoin silence, took me by the hand and led me through the long gallery again and upstairs to the further side of the beautiful garden, where we could look right into it and be unseen ourselves.

In its centre was a charming summerhouse built of cedar wood, half covered with green foliage where climbing roses grew and jasmine. The negro eunuch stood on guard beside the entrance, and on the other side the Caïd-en-Nsa.[6]

Reclining on a pile of cushions at the threshold, her draperies making a patch of gorgeous colour, lay Fetouma, the slave. The Bey sat within smoking and drinking coffee, but do what I would, I could not see his face.

[6] The Caïd in charge of the women.

He clapped his hands and from a balcony near by came the sound of reed flutes and tomtoms, played by musicians whom Hadj-Ahmed had blinded, so that they should not look upon the beauties of the harem. To the latter the music was evidently a signal, for the marble paved and pillared court round which ran the apartments of the women, became suddenly alive with forms, dream figures clad in every colour of the rainbow. Doors opened and there streamed into the garden girls of almost every age and every shade of skin from white to black: Circassians, Georgians, Arabs, Negresses, aye, even Europeans. Gold and jewels gleamed and glittered in the light of a thousand lamps. With the scent of flowers, and of incense burning in innumerable braziers throughout the Palace, was mingled the heavier odours of musk and of attar of rose. To the strains of the music was added the rustle of silks and the chink, chink of bracelets and anklets.

Amongst them there was one, who seemed to be their head, or leader, and whom they all obeyed: young though she was and looking only about twenty, the others treated her as if she were a queen. She was exceedingly, unusually beautiful, but never was tragic grief more strongly depicted on any woman's face.

"Who is that lovely girl with exquisite classic features and brown eyes? She looks so terribly sad," I whispered to my companion.

"That's Aïcha," said Fathma softly. "She and her brother were carried away from their home in

Italy when little children and sold as slaves in the market place at Alexandria. When her brother found out that she was here in my father's harem, he came and demanded to see her and my father was very angry and refused, of course. How could a strange man come here? Anselmo he was called and, like so many men, he would not take 'no' for an answer and he worried and worried, so that at last my father could not be troubled with him any more and he had his head cut off. It is since that, Aïcha has looked so very sad and she is very proud and haughty too. My father thinks a great deal of her and has given her charge of the seraglio and made her head over all the women, but I am sure she hates him."

Poor Aïcha! No wonder she looked grief-stricken as she marshalled her magnificently attired flock.

"What is she doing?" I asked.

"Two or three times a month my father has all the women brought before him. Either they pass by him as he sits in the Pavilion, or else they line up in two rows and he walks down between, asking questions about their health and if they want anything. Afterwards the Caïd-en-Nsa has to supply them with clothes, medicine, cosmetics, jewels, and anything else my father may wish them to have."

How I hoped he would come out of his den that I might see this dreadful monster, who seemed so callous to all human suffering; but he did not and the march past began.

What a curious sight it was! One woman after another, all with their arms crossed upon their breasts, with bent heads and lowered eyelids walked slowly by before the Bey. As far as I could tell very few dared to ask for anything. He had evidently risen, but still I could not catch a glimpse of him, for he stood within the shadow of the little house and its luxuriant creepers. With some he seemed to bandy words and jests — grim jests no doubt: others went by almost unheeded: one woman he struck full upon the mouth when she turned to answer him, an awful blow which made her reel. Now and again he detained one with a sign and such a one fell out of the ranks and stayed within call. When this happened Fetouma moved restlessly upon her pillows and seemed to try and catch the Bey's attention. She did this once too often and he kicked her brutally as he would a dog, but nothing worse occurred though I often felt sick with apprehension. On they came, more and still more! I had expected to see about fifty women at the most: *there were nearly four hundred.*

Then those few who had been commanded to wait, moved towards the Pavilion and there was a long pause. One, a pretty young girl all in white silk with a spangled veil draped over her head, seemed to hang back. To her the Bey handed his pipe. The negress raised herself once more, painfully, upon her cushion and shot at her rival a glance of jealousy and rage.

"Quick! Quick!" said Fathma, "that is the end.

You must go out at once or you will be locked in. The women are being shut up again in their rooms. Listen! . . .The locks are specially made to clang, so that if anyone tried to open a door in the night, the whole Palace would be aroused by the noise. Here's Seliman come to fetch you and the guard at the gate have orders to let you out. Go! Go!"

I felt myself being half pushed, half carried through a maze of rooms, then downstairs and along galleries, till we reached — how, I know not — a passage with three doors. Here my guide dropped me and I blindly made a dash for the door on the left hand, whereupon he ran back and saying that was the Bey's private way into the Mosque, opened another straight ahead and pushed me out. I simply flew down the narrow path that zigzagged and was shut in at the further end by a huge gate, steel-plated and guarded by Mamelouks.

Almost unnerved and overcome by a sudden feeling of relief at my own safety, I passed out and heard it crash behind me with the clanging noise of a gong.

The city was all dark. . . .

. . . . . .

"Woe to the Turks! Their glory hath departed!

. . . . . .

Their riches are scattered.
The Turks are bereft of their power.

. . . . . .

Such is the Will of Allah! Praise be unto Him!" [7]

[7] Prophecy of El-Hadj Aïssa.

CHAPTER XXVII

MEMORIES OF SALAH BEY

"The tongue is often the enemy of the neck."
ARAB SAYING.

"Every discourse hath its time and every deed its hour." TURKISH SAYING.

September, 1913.

NEARLY every capital, unless it be as modern, overgrown and cosmopolitan as our own, bears upon it the impress of some one of its rulers. This may be especially true of oriental cities under a despotic, and too frequently, unenlightened sway: it is certainly the case in Mahomedan Constantine, once the capital of the East Algerian Beylic. After a tour of the Mussulman quarter one exclaims: "Here lived and ruled Salah Bey!" to the exclusion of all the Turkish governors who preceded and the many who followed him. As they were entirely subject to the Deys of Algiers, it is easily understood that their tenure of authority was sufficiently insecure to be short lived and often end tragically. Salah's reign of twenty years was of unusual length: moreover he had a genius for administration and not only Constantine but the towns of the Sahara benefited by his wise, beneficent rule.

He was well acquainted with the needs of the province, having conducted several successful expeditions in the south when he was but a soldier of fortune, serving in the little army of the Beys.

On being raised to the position of Governor he enforced the payment of customs dues on all imports and exports at Colla, Stora, Bona and La Calle, and with the revenue thus obtained, built schools and mosques and carried out other public works. In the quarter once known by his name, and now as the Place Négrier, is a beautiful memorial, more often called the Mosque of Salah Bey, than by its proper title of Djemmâ Sidi el-Kettani.

Beyond the great ironbound door a wide passage leads to a flight of steps and a court above them, marble paved and tiled with porcelain, round which runs a circular gallery. The interior is a rectangle with five naves, divided by beautiful pillars of Italian workmanship and two cupolas surmount the whole. So cool and quiet is this house of prayer, that it is only by ascending the minaret and looking down on the city spread out immediately beneath, that one realises how crowded up against it are the shops and houses where dwell defenders of the Faith, as fanatical and as tenacious of their creed as were they in the time of Salah Bey. The ancient Medersa of that period, also built by him, adjoins the Mosque on the right hand but alas! it has been let as private dwellings and the body of the founder removed to a little hamlet, five miles away from Constantine, where he had built himself a country house.

Even in Roman days this oasis had been a favourite summer resort for the inhabitants of Cirta, as the capital was then called, and I found the drive there most enjoyable in the freshness of a sunshiny morning. It is not surprising that the sick who make a pilgrimage to the *koûba* of Sidi Mohammed-el-R'Orab,[1] on the opposite side of the fertile valley of the Rhumel, derive immense benefit from the *baraka*[2] of that noted saint, so delicious and invigorating is the air in the oasis of Salah Bey. His descendants supply the needs of the pilgrims and a building has been erected which is a sort of rude hospital, with mattresses and pillows on the ground and curtained off from one another. In a shed alongside, women were busy cooking soup and *couscous* for the invalids. Voices too hailed me from under a large cistern (repaired by the Bey when he built his palace) and I found there were bathers in the hot springs beneath the tank.

In the *koûba* itself were a few pale women, sitting close up against the high tomb and reverently handling its faded green and red draperies embroidered in silver and gold. Quite low on the ground beside it was a humble grave, partially covered by a long black plank, where lay the remains of the greatest of the Beys. He it was who had slain Sidi Mohammed and, as an act of atonement, when the *m'rabet* (like the Jackdaw of Rheims) "was canonised by the name of Jim Crow," Salah had raised this mausoleum in his honour. Then, after

[1] The crow. [2] The sacred force.

his own many vicissitudes, both in life and death the Bey had found a last resting place himself at the feet of his inveterate foe. The story, truly oriental in character, is a strange one and in effect as follows:

Despite the fact that Salah Bey endowed hotels for poor pilgrims at Mecca and Medina and built many mosques, as well as a Medersa and schools, with the money derived from imports levied at the Ports, the religious party in the capital took alarm at his endeavours to spread a knowledge of the sciences and to combat some of the prejudices and superstitions in that hotbed of fanaticism. Sooner or later then, it was inevitable that friction should arise between a Governor, who had embarked on such a bold venture, and the *m'rabets,* whose business it was to keep the light of learning burning low that the laity should continue to see only by the flame of Faith.

Of the Bey's many opponents the most violent and convinced was a certain Sidi Mohammed who was greatly revered on account of his saintly life. This *m'rabet* had also won renown as an orator and he waxed doubly eloquent on the subject of Salah's devilish works and wickedness, so that he soon had a large following of devoted adherents and became very influential. Encouraged by his success, Sidi Mohammed began to preach open resistance and the Bey felt he must take drastic measures to check, in its early stage, what promised to be shortly a very formidable rising against him. He was a strong man. He had the ringleader arrested and con-

demned him to death. In consideration of the *m'rabet's* popularity, it was a hazardous decision and needed an armed force to carry the matter through in the presence of a menacing, fanatical crowd, who would gladly have saved their saint from martyrdom. This was an impossibility owing to the Bey's precautions, but instead a very strange thing happened.

As the fatal stroke fell, which severed Sidi Mohammed's head from the body it became transformed into a great crow, to the amazement of the assembled populace. Croaking out a malediction the bird flew directly to Salah Bey's new pleasure house (only a mile and a half away as the crow flies) where it halted long enough to repeat its awful curse and then disappeared for ever.

No doubt the saint's disciples expected that some terrible punishment would at once overtake the Governor for his temerity. He may have thought so himself, or, perhaps was stricken by remorse, for he immediately set about building the little chapel in expiation of his deed and dedicated it to the martyr. Being rid, all the same, of a troublesome enemy, Salah Bey was again able to turn his attention to the welfare of the capital and province and, all unwittingly, knocked more nails into his own coffin. This time he fell foul of the authorities at Algiers.

The times and country were far from being altruistic: it is doubtful if such an idea even found expression in the Turkish or Arabic dialects. "Each man for himself and de'il tak' the hindmost" was

better understood and when the Pacha heard of the rebuilding of the Roman bridge (El-Kantara) at Constantine, he and his advisers at once concluded that more lay behind that ambitious undertaking of the Bey than appeared on the surface. The work was really one of great practical value and for the public good. Not only did it provide another exit from the isolated capital, but it brought the aqueduct into the city: water for the multitude crowded together on that high narrow rock.

Perhaps it was the religious party who carried the news to headquarters and hinted that Salah was only working for his own ends and paving the way to independence. They had been unappeased by the building of the *koûba* to St. Crow and, in addition, the rash and heedless Bey had the misfortune to offend a Tunisian saint, Sidi Obeïd, who, although dead, still performed miracles for his tribe when they invoked his valuable aid.

For some time past the Nememcha, who inhabited the borders of Constantine and Tunisia, had been exceedingly troublesome: they were for ever engaged in guerilla warfare and in pillaging the surrounding country. Matters came to such a pass that the Bey headed a punitive expedition against them, but unluckily he could not come up with his cunning enemies. Still more unfortunately he fell in with a caravan party of the Ouled Sidi Obeïd, who were returning from Tell with supplies of grain. As this tribe shared the territory of the Nememcha, the Bey believed that he might strike a blow indi-

rectly at the enemy through their friends and neighbours. He therefore commandeered their camels and, heedless of the protests of the leader, who was also a *m'rabet,* he ordered that the creatures should be branded with the mark of the Beylic.

Finding his expostulations of no avail, the chief of the Ouled Sidi Obeïd addressed himself to Allah and called upon the dead saint of his tribe to bear witness to the injury they had suffered. He prayed that the oppressor might be shortly removed from this world; that Sidi Obeïd would charge his cannon with powder and a bomb and turn the weapon against the Bey; that in the following month of *Achoûrâ* Salah and his two Caïds should be done to death by an unseen hand. Sent for by the Governor the *m'rabet* simply repeated his words and refused all offers of restitution made to him too late.

"What I have said, I have said!" he cried. "Not from you, nor from your successor will I accept what is not yours to give; but from him who will replace you both," so the Bey was not permitted to atone.

After this troubles came thick and fast. He was deposed by the Pacha of Algiers, who sent Ibrahim Bey in his stead and though he was able temporarily to regain his power by effecting the assassination of the new man, he could not overcome his destiny. A new Bey, Husseïn-ben-Bou-Hanek, arrived post haste from Algiers, who besieged Salah in his own palace, which he had built near the Mosque Sidi el-Kettani.

Finding resistance useless the deposed Governor offered to give himself up, provided he might go out under the protection of the Sheikh el-Islam, Sidi Abd-er-Rahman-ben-El-Fekoun. He must indeed have found himself in desperate straits for friends, to rely only for help on the head of the religious party. In the stress of the storm that had suddenly broken over him, had he forgotten the offences of past years; the living saint he had martyred; the dead saint whose tribesmen he had injured? If so, Sheikh el-Islam remembered! Once outside the palace he wrenched away his *burnous* from the unhappy man who had sought to escape by clinging to its hem and left him to be strangled in the open street.

And the day on which this thing came to pass, as had been foretold, was the fourteenth day of the month of Achoûrâ in the year 1792.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE DARWISHES

"Give me the knife that my flesh desires:
As it longed for the licking tongues of fires.
. . . . . .
More hard than the rocks where the falcon flies
Is the way to the Prophet's Paradise.
The lash on my loins has fallen like hail.
See! I offer my shaven head to the nail!"

"BARBARY SHEEP."

October 6th, 1913.

LONG before I went to Constantine I had heard strange tales of the Aïssaoua; of their weird mystic practices and the tortures they steel themselves to endure, in pursuance of the theory that the innocent may expiate the sins of the guilty by suffering physically in their stead.

It so chanced that shortly after my arrival in the city, the followers of Mahmed-ben-Aïssa held high festival and it was most disappointing to find that for the last four years Europeans have been strictly prohibited from attending. If the hotel guide may be believed this regulation was due to a lady, who was present at the rites and so completely lost her head, that she threw some article or other at the

adepts and went off into hysterics! As Constantine is a hotbed of fanaticism, it is not surprising that the authorities are anxious to prevent the recurrence of such folly, for the Order take themselves very seriously indeed. Their chief doctrine is that of continual aspiration for the Divine, culminating in an absorption in God so absolute that physical mortifications and bodily sufferings can no longer affect nerves, or senses. They cut themselves with knives and torture themselves by fire. In commemoration of their founder they swallow scorpions, glass and stones, for when his disciples were an hungered Mahmed-ben-Aïssa bade them eat what they saw on the road. His cult seems to have been modelled on that of the Haïdarya, a sect of Darwishes he met with in Egypt on his return from a pilgrimage to Mecca. He entered into close relationship with them and learned the narcotic properties of hemp and hachîch, of which the Soufi Haïdar is said to have been the discoverer and to have given to his disciples. Hachîch (unlike kif)[1] has no deteriorating effects on the physique of the smoker: it acts solely upon the mind, producing a state of ecstasy and religious hallucinations. Needless to add "That way madness lies" and it can be well understood the Aïssaoua is not an Order to be trifled with. They are not, however, the sole exponents of asceticism and self torture in Constantine, for there exists also a body of mystics whom the French call "Les Trembleurs," and the guides designate as "Dar-

[1] A preparation of opium.

wishes." They at first posed as dissidents from the Aïssaoua and now of the Rahmanya, but in reality they are followers of Bou-Aly, a *m'rabet* of the Kadrya, who was repudiated by his Order as he wished to modify their rule and found a new Confrérie himself. It may easily be seen that this strange Brotherhood, of various titles, occupy a somewhat anomalous position in the Mussulman hierarchy and they are actually and openly disavowed by the established Orders. Notwithstanding this, there is no doubt that secret relations exist between them and it has been suggested that the Rahmanya of Constantine are unofficial, unacknowledged emissaries deputed to impress the laity by public exhibitions of miracles and self torture.

Having obtained permission from the Préfecture, I arranged to be present at a performance to be given by adepts on the following Sunday night in an unpretentious Zaouïa, which I had visited in the day time when groups of small boys were being instructed in the Koran. The little chapel is built in memory of an ascetic whom some call Sidi Aïssa and some Sidi Ammar. His tomb occupies the northwest angle of the building and is walled round at some distance, thus forming an inner chamber for prayer with a door facing the one entrance to the Zaouïa on the south side. It seemed to me that at night the *mihrâb* had been removed to enable the attendants to pass from one room to another. There were two of these: a negro, with a *met'rek* to keep order, his head surmounted by an enormous yellow turban

in contrast to his blue Turkish trousers and short coat. The other was a Mahommedan; possibly one of the Brotherhood.

. . . . . .

A room which, but for rows upon rows of hanging lanterns and glass lamps at one side, would be absolutely devoid of any furnishings and, in their forefront, a large candelabra which alone is lit to illumine a scene of closely packed humanity. A strange repressed eagerness and excitement fills the air and it is heavy with the overpowering odour of a dark skinned race.

From low down beside the north wall rises a deafening din of flutes and tomtoms. The players are crouched against it, almost hidden by rows of white turbaned, white-robed Mussulmen, covering the floor, save for an empty zigzag in their midst. Standing in the centre, body and head above the audience and trembling violently, so that every muscle quivers, is an adept clad only in a shirt of vivid pink. He moves restlessly, with uncanny gestures, to and fro, staring about him, a half mad cunning in his eyes.

Two other darwishes are squatted, close to and facing the musicians. They rock themselves backwards and forwards, chanting their invocations to Allah, in a quick rhythm timed to the beat of the tomtoms, with high pitched monotonous tones which lead to physical exhaustion and cerebral delirium. Red handkerchiefs cover their heads which they pull down over their eyes, but he of the pink *gandoura*

has bared his shaven head and the little tuft of hair, by which he hopes one day to be lifted to high Heaven, falls in loose strands about his neck. Gradually, gradually, he works himself into a state of frenzy: finally, he demands a knife. It is brought from the inner room and passed on from one man to another till it reaches him, who continually calls for it, and he runs it into his neck up to the hilt and leaves it sticking there: an odious object, with its suggestion of physical torture; the curved handle projecting beyond the outline of his head.

To all appearance the audience is impassive, but that felt, repressed, unseen excitement grows, intensifies. A wave of such emotion passing through the crowd sends up the temperature still higher: the scent of sweating human beings is well nigh unendurable.

They move at last with relief which lessens the tension, for the attendant has brought water in a silver pail, beautifully chased and with long chains gathered together and caught at the end in a ring. The spectators drink thirstily; the vessel passes from hand to hand and is quickly emptied. Meantime the darwish, staggering about in an attempted continuance of his epileptic dance, suddenly collapses in a heap upon the floor. The negro, rolling his eyes till only the whites seem visible, goes to his aid and covers him with a *burnous,* beneath which his form still trembles, and presently, from the corner where he lies, is brought the knife he used and a little silver bowl of blood.

The tomtoms and the chants have never ceased: they stimulate the frenzy of the brain and another adept is ready for the torture. He comes forward swaying; places his hands on the attendant's shoulders to give him the kiss of forgiveness for the suffering about to be inflicted: then, stands firm whilst skewers are run into his cheeks, his ears, across his mouth slantwise, distorting his features, and his jaw is half hidden by the wooden handles.

Water is brought again for the spectators and a fascinating little pipe with mounts of green velvet and gold, which is given to the first adept, who has crawled to a place in line with those who look on. The drug is wonderful and does its work speedily. After a few whiffs he is up on his feet; offering himself again — a willing ecstatic victim, to have skewers thrust into the flesh of his arms. He has passed on the pipe to the third of the Brotherhood, who, racked by a trembling which simulates ague, is preparing himself for the ordeal by fire.

Now a little space is cleared for the negro. He has laid aside his stick and the flaming torch he carries lights up his sombre countenance. All around him are heads swathed in white muslin, but the gathering is too absorbed to dream of their own danger.

The adept's shirt has been slipped off under his *burnous* and he is practically naked to the waist. A superb, powerfully built, muscular body that has been cast in bronze! Holding his thin woollen garment at arm's length from himself, he takes the flam-

ing torch and, mass of fire that it is, lays it on his breast, bends his face down into it, plays the leaping flames over his naked arms, lifts it to his head, where it catches the handkerchief which partly falls in charred fragments, lets it die down and smoulder on his neck till it slowly flickers out.

His body is without scar or blemish. A miracle. . . .

CHAPTER XXIX

A STROLL AND A MORNING CALL

"Never! *Do you hear? Never will we open our harems; never will we expose our wives, our mothers, our sisters to the gaze of men: never shall the marriage ceremony of the Koran be enlarged, or modified: never will we permit a European to become the husband of a Mahomedan. Rather that our women should die, than be thus cheapened.*" L'Âme Musulmane.

October 10th, 1913.

HOWEVER curious and even exciting to some may be the Constantine of the past, for those who are not anxious to dive into its historical records, the city is quite sufficiently interesting and unusual in the present and I never tired of strolling about its narrow steep alleys, or of watching its inhabitants busily engaged in various trades. At first they stared and wondered why I came so often, but they soon accepted me as a part of the daily routine and even greeted me, or said to each other "Here comes the Mademoiselle" in quite a friendly manner. This, however, was largely due to Zila.

We made each other's acquaintance one day at

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A Street in Constantine

the school Paul Bert, where she was learning to weave and embroider and to be a useful, intelligent little girl as well as a pretty one. Had she not been a granddaughter of so great a personage as a *M'rabet* of the Aïssaoua, she might even have learned to read and write with a few lucky ones, not so highly born as herself, but tradition was too strong in her home to permit anything so extraordinary — not to say wicked — the wonder was that she was allowed to go to school at all.

To begin with, she would only look at me shyly with bright brown eyes and remained absolutely mute, but remembering how sugar loosens the tongue I soon succeeded in making her talk. After that, on Fridays and Sundays, she used to lie in wait for me and, turning some corner, or passing a doorway, in my favourite haunts, I would find her little muffled form close beside me and a small hand gently touching my skirt.

Only one surly old *M'rabet,* with a large chaplet of black and white beads hung conspicuously round his neck, objected to our growing friendship. He scowled at us both when we met him, bringing a frightened look into Zila's eyes and, calling her away, he talked to her angrily, whilst I waited within hail, not appearing to pay any heed. The scolding over, I was pleased to see that she was not too intimidated to make an ugly face at his dignified retreating figure, for I did not want to lose my new friend. She ran back to me again and we mutually avoided the subject as unsatisfactory when there

were other, more important matters to discuss, such as the relative value of surprise packets, costing one sou, in the sweet stuff shops. The *M'rabet's* warnings against the *roumya* were soon forgotten in the excitement of buying and eating. What a greedy little mouth it was to be sure; with its full, projecting, lower lip!

When Zila's immediate wants were satisfied we wandered together through tortuous lanes lined on both sides by wall cupboards, with all manner of things on sale; then, crab fashion we might arrive in the rue des Tanneurs, which runs right down to the Rhumel. There the smell of leather and the noise of the blacksmiths' anvils drove us back again into some quiet impasse, to find that two men had set up a mysterious wooden apparatus for winding long strands of silk on to bobbins by means of a big wheel moved by a handle.

The shops of the Mussulman quarter present daily an interesting series of tableaux vivants, each picture in its own frame and each on a tiny stage raised just above the level of the illpaved street. Every trade has its representatives, who confine themselves to one alley, or a portion of it, working away in the public eye within a box set on end with the lid off. At the top of the rue de Sérigny, which is more of a staircase than a street, the shoemakers are busy on both sides of the steps and in ten minutes it might be possible to see a slipper pass through all its stages of manufacture by watching first one vendor and then another: further down are butchers, bakers,

fruiterers. The grocers have taken up a position in the rue Perrégaux. Behind the narrow counters thereabouts are to be seen the fat, pasty faces of M'Zabites, patient, toiling, thrifty, consumed by one thought and hope of a speedy end to their term of exile and a return to their beloved cities of Ghardaïa, Mélika, Beni-Isguen, where dwell wives and children by the wonderful palm gardens of the far south. No doubt because they are congregated in the vicinity, an enterprising photographer took it into his head to label one of his pictures "Mosque M'Zabite." It is a very beautiful and very mysterious little place, at the corner of the rue Perrégaux and the rue des Tanneurs, with an inscription above its portals in green and gold. He is quite wrong however, for no broken pyramid surmounts the roof, and I have been assured that there is no such thing as a M'Zabite mosque in all Constantine; but perhaps, like myself, he was refused admission and jumped to a false conclusion.

"It is not wise to ask to enter," said a guide who saw me on the threshold, so I took Zila to it and said to her: "What is that place? I may not enter there." She gave an all-sufficient reason: "It is a School for Saints!"

Another day my little companion lingered by a large open room in a quiet back street and told me its occupants were *m'rabets*. On seeing us one of them, a visionary with dreamy eyes, came forward to tell me that he and his colleague were there to give alms and assistance to the poor. Not from

Zila, but from quite another source I subsequently learned that the ascetic Mussulman was something of a wizard. My informant added that occasionally men, even very holy men, married *djinns* by whom they were taught magic arts. Such men might not be content with the ordinary ablutions before prayer,[1] as enjoined by the Koran, but must wash all over every day. This particular *m'rabet* would give advice and predict the future for a small fee, so I resolved to consult him.

The interview was most amusing! The poor *m'rabet* was so entirely at a loss to account for such a strange being as an unmarried woman, living all alone in a foreign country, with no apparent motive or occupation. All the more was I a puzzle as he could not speak French and probably knew next to nothing about Europeans and their eccentric ways and customs.

The climax was reached when he requested me to hold tightly in my hand a piece of blank paper, in which he had wrapped a franc, and he made passes over my closed fist before I opened it again. When I did so and the paper was unfolded, the franc had disappeared and on the half sheet was a picture (obviously cut from some tailor's advertisement) of a terrible young man divided up into measurements to facilitate the purchase of a suit by post.

Till then I had remained as grave and impassive as the *m'rabet* himself, knowing full well that there

[1] Before prayer a Mussulman must wash his face, his hands, his arms to the elbows and his feet.

is nothing an Arab resents more than being made fun of; but "the man I might have married" was too much for me and I broke into a peal of laughter. This greatly excited some women, who had come in singly (all muffled up of course) to consult Sir Oracle, and they called out "Shouf! Shouf!"[2] They crowded round me to look at the picture and were curious to know what had amused me, only thinking the *m'rabet* marvellously clever, so I left them without any attempt at explanation, to be further impressed, no doubt, by the magic of the *djinn's* husband.

. . . . . .

It must not be supposed that the whole Mussulman town is given up to shops and busy traders; that all the streets are noisy and often made impassable by troops of heavily laden donkeys, whose burdens are knocked off in the press of people pushing amongst them.

Far from it: there are innumerable mosques at quiet corners; large baths; café maures, for the idlers to gossip in and listen to sweet singing birds or tomtoms and flutes as they toy with their little cups. There is many a lane and impasse lined with tall mysterious houses, from which none issue forth, nor demand entrance. They have windows high up, but no one looks out of those tiny panes: there are knockers to closed doors — a hand, an iron ring —but no one ever raises them. A passerby is rare. It may be a well clad Mussulman slowly pur-

[2] Let us look.

suing his way elsewhere: or even, a great lady, whose eyes alone are visible above her yashmak of white gauze, and whose attendant follows closely on her heels, carying a piece of brocade or of bright hued silk just purchased from an Arab in the rue Vieux; or from the Jews in the rue de France or the alleys behind it, where 8,000 of them herd together and grow rich. A door must open somewhere to admit her. If only I, too, could cross the threshold! This became my great ambition: to penetrate into one of these great silent dwellings. The hotel guide did his best for me; or only pretended to, perhaps, knowing all the while his task was hopeless. He made elusive appointments for the morning and then altered the hour to later in the day. He even took me to the courtyard of a mansion, part of which jutted out and formed an arch over the narrow street. I was enchanted, but alas! the servitor within the entrance stared in amazement and gravely shook his head at my demand for admission through the inner, fast shut door. It was a problem, but Zila solved it and crying "Open Sesame" took me into her own home.

One day — it was the 3rd of October — Zila went to school in very smart attire. She was dressed in pale mauve brocade, too plentifully trimmed with black lace. Placed coquettishly on one side of her head she wore the little pointed bonnet of the Constantinoise, which is in shape like a small inverted funnel, and which she kept in position with a white fringed kerchief draped over it and

tied round her head. In front she had placed a tiny wreath of purple and white flowers, and her long plait was covered with a rose coloured ribbon, wound round and round it till not a hair was visible, and fastened on to the end with a safety pin was a broader length which dangled down her back. It turned out that the Order of the Aïssaoua, of which her grandfather was a *m'rabet,* had been holding high festival on the preceding day and she was still in her costume de fête. "All the others too," she added, and in five minutes it was arranged that she should take me to see her relations in their finery after school was over.

Instead of Zila lying in wait for me, on this occasion I waylaid her, having first invested in two large packets of sweets. No doubt her little mouth watered, for she had to carry one parcel and it was tied up with beautiful gilt cord which I did not offer to undo.

It amused me to find that for some reason, or other, best known to herself, she led me at top speed by a long and circuitous route. Perhaps she thought it wise to try and puzzle me by way of precaution and so prevent me from paying a second call and making myself a nuisance to her family.

We dived down alleys, turned corners, passed under arches — Zila ahead all the while and looking back, now and again, over her shoulder — and at last I discovered that we were crossing the rue de France to a part of the town I had not yet explored. We went up a short hilly street on the right side of

which was a slope with a handrail. Here my guide paused: we had arrived.

At the second door Zila knocked, and together we entered a long, narrow, flagged passage, at the further end of which was another open door, with an enormous woman seated on the step. She rose when she saw me and opposed her bulky form to mine, but calling out *"Roumya"* I slipped quickly past her for, luckily, she was not quite wide enough to block the way.

I stood in a large, square court with walls and pillars that had been washed a vivid blue, and a gallery running right round. It was empty save for a little boy of about seven or eight who was playing a lonely game of his own invention on the red bricked floor. Zila had vanished, but presently she reappeared and invited me to go upstairs, where there were four large apartments with barred apertures for air, and white curtains over each doorway. They were filled with women and quite young children.

Spread over the floors in every direction and on the wide wooden *dokanat,* in such a manner as to accommodate the greatest possible number, were rows of mattresses with long, narrow, rose-pink pillows covered with white muslin slips. All the rooms were beautifully clean and tidy; nobody and nothing out of place. There was no furniture of any description, but in another apartment, where I was not invited to enter, I could get a glimpse of a writing table, or cabinet, and some chairs.

Except for their red, black, or gold embroidered shoes, which they had slipped off in the gallery outside, the occupants of the rooms were fully dressed in silk, or brocade, and a few in less costly clothes. Some were sound asleep: most of the others got up when they saw a visitor and somebody fetched a chair and put it in the gallery. Then they came flocking round me, especially the children who clung about my knees and stared at me with solemn, big, brown eyes. One friendly little creature, dressed in deep purple silk, with a round green and gold embroidered cap set on one side, rushed off and brought a black and white kitten, which was plumped down on my lap.

I sat in the gallery for about an hour, just watching the women — about forty of them perhaps — come and go, pass and repass, upstairs and downstairs: everyone in most gorgeous attire and wonderful combinations of vivid colours, and everyone of them purposeless and idle. It was interesting to notice that they were neither tatooed, nor so much rouged, as the poor class of women I had come across and I was glad to have an opportunity of confirming by my own experience what hitherto I had only learned through the eyes of others. The one most "made up" was a very grand and haughty young woman with a large fat face that would soon coarsen into ugliness and that, without the saving grace of a pleasant expression. She came from a room into which I had not been admitted and was dragging a tiny child by the hand as she slowly sailed along the

gallery. She was robed in pale blue brocade with a head-dress of a darker shade, and dependent from it at the back, to the very edge of her skirt, was a "follow me lads" in a tint of warm terra cotta. No English great lady could have better feigned the most complete ignorance of the presence of an unasked, unpleasant and unwelcome guest than did she.

In striking contrast to her manner was that of an elderly and very gracious little person, with the bright attractive eyes of an intelligent animal. She was dressed, most suitably to her age, in wine coloured silk, with a white lace flounce, over an underskirt (which she took care to let me see) of bright yellow brocade and had arranged black and gold drapery over her hair.

There were others in shades of yellow varying from pale lemon to deep sulphur and yet more in blue, which seemed a favourite colour, but the pick of the brocades was one patterned with large moon daisies.

In nearly every case the women's quaint, pointed headgear was worn under silk, or spangled veiling, and kept in place by charming gold chains, formed of links and fastened under the chin; whilst the children put their bonnets outside their kerchiefs and had them covered with velvet, either red or green and sometimes both. A number wore artificial flowers, especially wreathes or bunches of jasmine, fastened in the draperies on their heads, in honour of the festival of the preceding day.

The standards of Islam which had been used for

the procession were furled and fastened against the supports of the gallery at one end of the court and would have further identified the house as belonging to a *m'rabet,* had I been in doubt as to Zila's parentage. They were presently displayed to me with great pride by her father who appeared on the scenes quite suddenly at midday. Seeing him I left the gallery and went down into the court to explain my presence and, with true Arab courtesy and hospitality, he concealed any surprise he may have felt, made me most welcome and invited me to breakfast in the kitchen where sat his mother (to whom he introduced me) and the fat portress, who no longer eyed me with suspicion. He and I had bread, melon and coffee, which was all excellent fare, in a spotless kitchen of which any European servant might have been proud. After we had finished our meal, the master of the house took me into another portion of the premises, where a great quantity of meat was being cut up for couscous, and after I had admired the house to his genuine pleasure and satisfaction, and had thanked him most cordially for a delightful visit, I bowed myself out.

A few days later most regretfully I bade a long farewell to my little friend Zila and to Constantine.

CHAPTER XXX

THE GATE OF THE DESERT

"Of all the places in Algeria, none is more famous. There, the contrast is sharpest between the rocky plateau and the oasis; the Orient suddenly appears behind a Golden Gate."

ELISÉE RECLUS.

"Derviche, marabout, un fou, c'est-à-dire un saint." E. FROMENTIN.

October 14th, 1913.

IT is said of Constantine that the climate is a poor one; too hot in summer, too cold in winter, only at its best in spring: but whether it was chance or luck, I had nothing to complain of during my autumnal visit, except on the morning of my departure. It simply poured!

Sorry as I was to leave, yet there lay at the back of my mind a longing for the south, which was daily becoming more and more insistent and the torrential rain put the finishing touch to its strength. Oh! for the magic of sun and sand!

So intense is the desire in some cases that it amounts almost to physical illness and I have seen a man greet the first desert sunrise he had seen for many a long day, with a thanksgiving in his falter-

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The Gate of the Desert

ing voice that betrayed a joy so great as to be akin to tears. He had thrown up an excellent berth in Algiers to volunteer for service in the Sahara and when he found himself back in it again; in the light which makes for transfiguration; in the clear pure air which is the untainted breath of Heaven, he was as a sick man who is suddenly healed.

Robust, practical people "with no nonsense about them" will probably exclaim, "What folly!" or, "All fudge!" nor is it likely that personal experience would do aught but confirm them in this sensible opinion. They will probably be more in sympathy with the party of tourists, who left Biskra to camp out in the desert, but for whom one day amongst the sand dunes was enough! They fled back to the busy haunts of man, appalled by the silence. Clearly these folk should spend their days in hotels and casinos: it is all a matter of temperament. To those for whom the desert is not silent, it calls with a persistence that cannot be gainsaid.

In six hours I was at the gate of the enchanted country: at the bridge [1] which crosses the river Funm es-Sahara,[2] as the Arabs have christened the water which flows amongst the boulders, through a basin shut in by grey rocky slopes. A dreary forbidding entrance between high, pitiless, limestone rocks such as always properly guard the beauties of fairy tale land expressly to frighten away the unwelcome and timorous. Pass boldly through between them and hey presto! there are luxuriant palm

[1] Kantara. [2] Mouth of the Desert.

gardens covering acres of space and populous villages — villages so different as to form quite a study in themselves. It is extraordinary that there could be such diversity in the clumps of huts, or groups of hamlets, which go to the making of a Berber *dashera*.[3] Each successive one that I visited seemed to have a character of its own; frequently, but not always, decided by the surrounding landscape.

To begin with, there is one about five miles to the northwest of El Kantara and therefore, properly speaking, outside the gate. Before the memory of man a tribe wandered into the Tilatou valley — perhaps on their way south — and never got any further. They found it so lovely that they stayed in the very centre of the Gorges amongst the rocks and the narrow mountain paths and tracks, along which an enemy could only come upon them at great peril to himself. It may be they were lazy folk and were glad to be spared the trouble of building shelters of any kind. Here Nature had made ready for them rock dwellings, into which they crept and in which generation after generation has been content to live, with but an opening in the roof to let the smoke out and a rude construction in front to ensure a little more privacy. Some such business was on hand the afternoon I rode through and the women were doing the hardest part of the job, running away down the steep slopes after one another and clambering up again, with the sure-footedness of the goats, in whose skins they carried it. They were wild crea-

[3] Village.

tures with fluttering bright hued rags which just covered their lithe forms and the guide was apologetic, explaining that they were mountain savages and had no manners, which was true. As soon as I had given them all the pennies I had with me and showed them my empty purse, they shrieked "*Emshi! Emshi! Emshi!*" [4] with one accord and tried to push me on my way: most unlike the hospitable Arabs.

No one meets with such discourtesy and unkindness on the other side of the Gate, in the three villages of Constantine's most northern oasis. Excepting guides, the inhabitants are busy amongst the palms which are at their best and most beautiful just now: a study in rich greens and golden browns. Every mule and *bourriquot* has been requisitioned: their paniers are filled with luscious dates, or with the flexible, coral pink fibre which held them together in great bunches on the trees.

The "mad Marabout" [5] of Khrekar, either by pure chance, or in obedience to a colour sense somehow developed in his misty brain, has attired himself in a long robe which harmonises with the food Allah has so bountifully provided for His children in the desert. He is not held in much account by the educated Mussulmen, not having inherited the title to holiness from a long line of priest magicians. He is playing at it, they say rather contemptuously; but amongst the humbler, who have no claim to "a

[4] Go! Go! Go!

[5] French word used equally for m'rabet, saint, fool, madman, or tomb of a saint.

little learning," I am sure he is regarded as one of God's saints on earth, and that it is known to them, he has attained to one of the seven degrees of illumination, by which alone it is possible to be spiritually perfect. He is clearly a harmless visionary by the dreamy, far-away, guileless look in his mild blue eyes and, if the colour of his robe has been chosen by design and not by accident, he is an adept, whose lights number 40,000 and whose soul is in ecstasy. He comes down the village street at the pace of the rhythm of his endless monotonous chant, always the same phrases over and over and over again, which has helped to create his chaotic condition of mind, whilst satisfying his imperious demand for eternity; a craving stronger than reason.

The mad marabout in his golden brown *gandoura* is but a part and parcel of life in these three villages, which have been christened White and Black and Red: the first two merely to complete a trilogy and as a foil to Dahraouïa with its warm red walls, which the sun touches so lovingly at eventide, deepening and intensifying their tones. This is the characteristic of the Village Rouge, which stretches picturesquely along the right bank of the river above the green of the palms and their brown fruit, its approaches lying through cactus groves where stands a cone shaped koûba.

CHAPTER XXXI

VILLAGES OF THE SOUTH

"Nous parlons du pays qui resplendit là-bas, très loin, sous le prestigieux soleil."

ISABELLE EBERHARDT.

"Visitez les tombes des Saints du Dieu Puissant.
Elles sont parées de vêtements imprégnés de musc,
Que sillonnent des éclairs d'or pur."

SIDI KHALIL.

November 13th, 1913.

THE idea of distance from one place to another is best conveyed to Arabs by the length of time occupied in traversing it on shank's mare. If asked by them how long it takes to get from Paris to London, to say seven and a half hours would be worse than futile, as they have not the slightest conception of the swiftness of our trains and boats, so would immediately reply in astonished tones: "They are quite near together then!" Thus, now-a-days, is speed constantly annihilating space and thus, even the Desert, is being telescoped towards Europe.

A short while since the Sahara of Constantine was a country afar off: within six months, or so, the new railway line from Biskra will bring it within two

days' journey of Phillippeville, the port. Globe trotters who have skirted the fringe of the Desert in the morning, may be in Touggourt, near the heart of it, at setting of the sun.

At present, however, the only means of conveyance for tourists, who are not also millionaires, is the light springless cart ("courrier postal") which takes the mails in twenty-eight hours (plus a night's rest at M'raïer) over a track which has turned the driver's hair snow white, though he is one of the most powerfully built men I have ever seen, and is still under thirty.

As 225 miles lay between me and the capital of the Souf, whither I was bound, I was anxious to be spared all unnecessary fatigue and shirked the prospect of playing the game of a post parcel for two days and a night, even if labelled, "This side up with care." The railway was only finished as far as Djemâa and had not yet been opened. No passenger trains were running but, thanks to the courtesy of the Chef de l'Annexe at Biskra, for which I was deeply grateful, I was granted special permission to travel as merchandise and spent the greater part of ten hours in the company of casks of nails.

Even had I been forced to avail myself of the cart, I must have gone, for what would it have mattered how tired I was? What does anything matter if one can only get well over the borders of fairyland?

Of course Djemâa was under the wizard's rule! Long violet shadows empurpled the earth reflecting

masses that the sun had coloured rose. A crescent moon had revealed itself prematurely in the heavens and had helped to lighten the sombre green of the trees to the paler hue of pistachio nut. I walked between gardens, on a carpet, so thick that Caliban's admonition "to tread softly, that the blind mole may not hear they foot fall" would have been needless. White robed gliding figures led me to a lake, as still as glass, amid a grove of palms. Others met and welcomed me: one, in bright scarlet, that defied the magic of the sun and moon, touched my outstretched hand and then his own lips in greeting.

How had I come? Was it by auto? they all questioned, for in this especial kingdom Cinderella's enchanted coach is no longer drawn by horses; but I — was not Cinderella!

Retracing my steps, I faced a line of low white buildings and saw a figure, muffled up in black, running swiftly, ever so swiftly, as if in fear; then waiting, watching at the corner of a narrow street; finally vanishing away in dark shadows of the night, that had suddenly overtaken her and me.

In the morning the wizard was busying himself elsewhere. The world was very real and the sun hot, even at 9.30, when I climbed into the little postal cart for the last stage of this journey. I was feeling a little the worse for wear after travelling as a bale of goods on the previous day. Twenty miles of terrible jolting behind three mules and the postman delivered a dejected-looking object at the hotel about five o'clock.

I had arrived at Touggourt just in time for high market, which is held on Fridays, though it may well be said that there is a perpetual fair at this Queen of Oases. It holds the proud position of being an important junction for the caravan routes to Ouargla, the M'Zab and the Souf. In November business is so brisk that it overflows into the Grande Place, for the dates have been picked and packed into hundreds of thousands of little oblong boxes, piled up ready for transit by carts, mules, donkeys and especially by camels.

During my week's visit, it was a daily affair to see long caravans start off through the deep sand northwards, laden with *deglet-en-nûr,* the most succulent and superior variety; as well as soft, sweet, white and red dates, which all flourish in the palm gardens, once described as being on the banks of the salt lake of Ghemora. The lake has disappeared: much marshy land has been reclaimed and, by means of artificial irrigation, Touggourt will again become the fertile, rich oasis of a prehistoric age. The ever shifting sand dunes, that the winds toy with, gradually buried the vegetation in a golden avalanche, but numberless artesian wells are restoring a dead country to life once more. Even after the French occupation, nearly a third of the caravan route from Biskra lay through arid steppe: not a tree, nor a well visible anywhere in fifty miles, where now are flourishing, populated oases.

The water problem was grappled with for generations by the Rhetassa, a section of the black-

skinned Rouaras inhabiting this region, who had the monopoly of constructing the wells. Their physique became singularly well adapted for their primitive methods of working and they were able to remain nearly three minutes under water without suffering any apparent inconvenience. However, machinery has stepped in and supplanted them in their dangerous diving operations, though I believe they are still employed in some districts, to do battle with the accumulations of sand, which are always threatening to choke the wells. These increase in number yearly and with them the date harvest: therefore, it may be confidently expected that, when the coming railway facilitates speedier transit, the French Government will be recompensed for their immense expenditure on irrigation in the South and that many fortunes will be made in the Valley of the Oued Rhir.

There are rumours, too, of a casino that is to be built, and other attractions for tourists, which will all tend to the founding of a second Biskra, where Touggourt now is, and it will be robbed of its beauty by day and its serenity by night. Come what may, the sun must still be resplendent and glorify the golden sand hills, but they will get hidden and pushed far away from the precincts of the town. When the red and purple dies out of the evening sky, will the magician still linger to wave his wand and turn New Touggourt into a snow city? Now, when the moon rises white walls, lightly touched by silver, line squares all powdered thickly with white dust, whose inhabitants have been frozen into a profound sleep.

Outside the town are snowy banks and a vast, far reaching plain where, now and again, a solitary palm, bearing testimony to a vegetation long extinct, throws its long black shadow on the pale ground. If any figures moved, would they be real or phantoms of the dead, buried in the sand, which every night rolls down softly, noiselessly, seeking to engulf the marble tombs, only to be carefully removed when morning comes and man renews his endless struggle against Nature.

Beyond the sculptured stones are queer-shaped flints, in hundreds, marking the little mounds beneath which rest Arabs and Rouaras; and, far away, its cupolas lost in clouds of darkness, rises a mausoleum to protect the graves of kings.

For there was a Sultan of Touggourt as late as a century ago, whose authority was absolute and who was hedged round by much oriental state and ceremonial. To reach him in his stronghold, it was necessary to pass through seven doors, each one of them guarded by negro slaves. He only shed the light of his tanned visage on his subjects once a week: on Fridays when, as a good Mussulman, he attended the mosque. Standing near the old town, with its crumbling walls of houses, that have their foundations on the sand, I could picture him riding forth into the desert, preceded by musicians, accompanied by a negro body guard, black runners at his stirrups and an enormous parasol over his head.

The scene I actually witnessed, though perhaps less awe inspiring and Eastern, was equally gay and

picturesque. Flags draped the white buildings of the Bureau Arabe and, on either side its wide entrance were grouped the Caïds in their red official robes and the Cadis in blue over *guenader* of white silk. Barbaric music announced that some unwonted excitement was on foot and brought the inhabitants flocking from all directions into the Grande Place, round the well in its centre, all eager to see a show.

The General was returning from a tour of inspection in the district and he rode up with his staff in all the glory of red and blue and gold, followed by Spahis on their restless Arab chargers and *Méharistes* mounted on the quick trotting camels, which have been called "ships of the Desert." Truly a brave show!

The party had breakfasted nine miles away at the famous *Zaouïa* of Tamelhat, with the *M'rabet* of the Tidjanïa. This is one of the wealthiest and most powerful of Mussulman Orders and the only one that has its origin, tradition and interests solely in Algeria. Its founder expressly laid down the rule that in no case should it be affiliated to any other community whatsoever.

Attached to the Mosque and leading out of it is the most beautiful *koûba* I have seen in the South. Apart from its unusual size and height there is nothing to distinguish the building outside, but the interior is really exquisite.

Perhaps it is its age — and yet it is not ancient — that helps to lend it a dignity which at once conveys

the knowledge that this place is very sacred. Perhaps it is the sunshine, falling softly through coloured glass in the lofty dome making a gentle twilight reign within, that lowers voices and even arrests speech. Perhaps it is the high tomb of El-Hadj Aly, in the centre, that imposes a reverential hush. The walls are lost to sight behind a white plaster fabric that is fashioned like lace. There are standards and draperies, which have lost their garishness. Time has dealt with them so tenderly that they are beautified, and the air faintly perfumed with musk, is filled with memories and prayers.

When I visited the Zaouïa itself, to all appearances it was deserted and my enquiries as to the number of students hidden away behind those plain walls and barred apertures were useless. I penetrated into one court, closed in by high locked doors, but not a soul was to be seen except my uncommunicative guide, who had met me at the entrance, and a negro boy busily knitting a white skull cap. Coffee was served in an apartment upstairs, off a white stone terrace. It was rather a fascinating room, long and narrow with an alcove and doors leading — who knows where? Its walls were painted gaily and all the upper part ornamented with green, red and yellow arabesques and other strange devices, that reminded me of my Spanish playing cards. Unfortunately, there was a French bedstead in the alcove by the window, a mattress on the floor and a litter of European furniture that suggested a boxroom in which unwanted odds and ends had been hastily

stowed away. I rather wondered whether I had disturbed the occupant of this quiet retreat, out of sight and sound of the world, and if he had done a bolt to escape the foreign woman. All the inhabitants of that mysterious group of buildings were equally successful in avoiding me, except of course the servants, who sat outside, under cover of an arcade and on a massive stone bench, which ran along by the houses.

To make up for the coldness of my reception at the Zaouïa, the whole hamlet turned out into the narrow ill kept streets, which lead to it, to see me off, and the children followed the waggonette part of the way to Temacin, as escort. I had noticed the village when passing it in the morning and am convinced the *djinns* must have had a hand in its building and that this was how it happened: —

Once upon a time a little English boy made himself a large sand castle on the sea shore, but he was too small to reach across the moat, with which he had surrounded it and plant a flagstaff in its exact centre, so he placed it at arm's length on the side nearest himself where he stood. Then at the other side he made an approach over the moat, so that his construction, which he had intended to be circular, became elongated at one end.

The *djinns* saw the sand castle when it was finished and said to each other: "Let us make the children of the Sahara build a village after this plan!" and straightway Temacin rose gradually, situated on a slight elevation in the Desert, with the

minaret of its Mosque rising high above the houses on one side.

Then the white man came along and, having nothing to do with *djinns,* he drained away the water and made a road where the moat had been.

CHAPTER XXXII

DAWN AND SUNSET

"Day by day Thou art making me worthy of the simple, great gifts that Thou gavest to me unasked — this sky and the light . . . *saving me from perils of overmuch desire."*

RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

November, 1913.

THE journey to Oued-Souf is divided into stages, of from four to five hours each, by Government rest houses, kept by retired *goumiers* [1] who carry the mails through that strange deserted country, which lies between, of sand and sky and solitude. They take the post up from one another in relays, so that it goes through in a surprisingly short time. Colonists, whose business lies at the back of this especial beyond and who are anxious to return to civilisation at the earliest possible moment, push on their reluctant beasts and reach their destination at the end of a second day's ride. Dead beat, from all accounts and no wonder! It is not the distance that does it — what is a sixty miles' ride on a good horse, mule or camel? — but the sand banks. After the first couple of hours the

[1] Soldiers belonging to native regiments.

whole question of getting to El Oued resolves itself into one of climbing up and then climbing down in deep sand, such as is hardly conceivable; occasionally varied by stretches of steppe, sparsely covered with a dried-up vegetation peculiar to the Desert. Unpromising though it looks, the tender stalks of *drinn* suffice to nourish the camel, and its seeds, which resemble poor wheat, are often harvested by the nomads themselves for lack of more acceptable food.

Not feeling inclined to break a record, or half kill myself merely to save time, I determined to take life easy in the solitudes and stay a night at each *bordj*.[2] This necessitated provisions for eight days, both food and drink; for the well water is as salt as the sea and I had sufficiently tested its properties at Djemâa.

A coarse brown canvas sack called a *tellis* was packed full of bottles and tins and was balanced on the other side of a camel by my holdall with its bulging contents: my bath and bedding covered his hump, to which Mahomed, my servant, added his scanty baggage. The *jemmal*[3] possessed only his beast and the rags he stood up in, and he walked the whole way there, and back via Guémar,— 130 miles — in the sand.

Thus equipped and accompanied, in the early dawn of an exquisite morning I started for Oued-Souf.

The road out of Touggourt is excellent, skirting palm gardens, and the region of sand hills begins

[2] Government rest house. [3] Camel driver.

only when a stone pyramid is reached, the first of several *guemiras*[4] erected about every six miles apart, to indicate the bewildering route. It was comforting to see them, but so far as I am concerned they would never be the slightest assistance. Had my mule succeeded in bolting back with me on the second day, as he very much hoped, even had I regained control I must have left the choice of tracks to his instinct, or preferably have followed the telegraph poles, rather than have trusted to my faulty sense of locality, supplemented only by pyramids, which pointed nowhere.

By that time we were surrounded on every side by dunes. They rose up higher and higher, or so it seemed, in front, behind and on every side. The incomparable golden glory, that the light lends them, was often spoiled by deep indentations left by nomads and their beasts in their noiseless passage over the sides; and the ridges of the lowest were broken down, making minute, untidy paths for the animals to traverse. It was the highest hills that were beautiful: soft and smooth looking: unmarked, save for the feather-stitch track of the scarabei, or the little rippling waves due to the caprices of the wind.

The sight of a *bordj* with a dome surmounting it, like a saint's *koûba,* was invariably welcome, for the sun was scorching after 10 o'clock. I could not always reach shelter before blazing time, and was tired and hungry after four, or five, hours in such air.

All the rest houses were built on the same plan.

[4] Pyramidal sign posts.

Cool high walls, two or three lofty rooms on one side of a square of building and stables on the other, with an open yard of sand between and the whole closed in at night by high gates. They were clean and all possessed one wooden table, covered with candle grease, and a few ricketty chairs.

After three nights of such accommodation, Madame Sagnier's little bedroom seemed very luxurious and I could congratulate myself on having arrived at El-Oued, despite ominous warnings of exhaustion and possible starvation.

Here was another curious village, with absolutely new characteristics; quite different from any I had seen hitherto. It has been compared to an enormous clump of beehives, for the roofs of the houses are a series of domes, in long lines and depressions between. Surely it is unnecessary to go so far afield for a comparison, when rounded sand dunes stretch to the horizon, as far as eye can reach. Was it not by their configuration that the builders were inspired? All the scene seemed to be formed on the bowl principle; whether inverted, or not. The palm trees were planted in enormous artificial basins and it was strange indeed to see their dark green foliage massed together, level with the market place, instead of towering high above one's head. A country like unto none other: golden hills alternating with great green filled hollows: where there is nothing that will grow to meet men's needs save date palms. Always, and only dates, so absurdly inadequate to fulfil the requirements of Europeans

and yet ample for the primitive children of the desert!

The rich fruit nourishes their bodies: from the willowy pink wands they make cord to harness their beasts of burden. The young growth is sacrificed for a vegetable which tastes like pineapple: the trees too old to bear are tapped for *el-Eugmi,*[5] resembling cider, but heady if allowed to ferment. Many are the uses of the palm for the nomad.

Once planted, in the surface water at the bottom of the hollows, which is raised by means of long drawn beams from the wells, they are so little trouble to cultivate. Think how that appeals to a people dwelling on sand, under an eternal sun, where the seasons slip so gradually into one another that, who knows when spring begins and it is already summer.

It is winter now, but I, for one, cannot credit it, till the day ends, and the lord of the desert sinks to his rest in a sea of golden red flames. Bidding goodnight to the Ouled Naïl woman, as she crosses the wide open space before the guarded gates of the Bureau Arabe, he wraps her in a garment of unearthly vivid rose. Then, more gently, lights up the deep orange and dark blue draperies of the Souafa, who are busy making *couscous* in a closed-in, sheltered yard. When he has suddenly gone, El-Oued is cold: its houses dull grey. Within, they are always dark, being windowless, and thus completely shut out his rays, keeping the inhabitants in a perpetual sombre twilight; and the doors are so

[5] Palm wine.

low that, small though the women are, they must bend to creep into their prisons.

Though physical life need not be greatly strenuous, under that fiery sun it cannot fail to be ardent. Passions are strong and crude: the Faith of Islam, which burns steadily elsewhere, in the Souf leaps into flame and blazes like a wind blown torch.

On market day I went to the Mosque, to look down from its high minaret over the palm gardens and the throng of men collected in the Square; but, chiefly, to pay my respects to the *m'rabet,* whose satellites approach him with the deepest respect. He was seated on the threshold of the zaouïa, which is within the precincts, clad in the bright green robe worn by direct descendants of the Prophet. Even Mahomed, my guide, who was a thought too modern for my taste, and had not hitherto impressed me with any evidences of religious fervour, bent before this old man, kissing the hem of his garment with reverential awe.

Djemmâs and *koûbas* and tombs of saints abound in the Souf, but most impressive of all the religious buildings, is the *Zaouïa* of the Tidjanïa and the new mosque they are raising to the glory of God at Guémar.

This neighbouring oasis and annexe of El-Oued is situated eleven miles away over the sand. I rode there on my return journey and put up for a night at the house of the Khalifa Mohammed ben Brahim, Caïd of Guémar. He was far too dignified and polite to express over much surprise at the sud-

den apparition of an Englishwoman, asking for hospitality: and he is, as a matter of fact, very desirous that tourists should find their way to his village in sufficient numbers to justify him in opening an hotel. He had lately built a beautiful and very lofty hall, which ran along the entire length of his house, about twenty-five feet, where we breakfasted and dined together in solemn and solitary grandeur, and the Arab cooking, with its highly seasoned and novel dishes, was a treat after a long course of tinned foods.

In the late afternoon I proposed that, with his permission, I would like to visit the Zaouïa and though it struck me the suggestion by no means met with Monsieur le Caïd's approval (for some unknown reason), as he offered no definite objection, I went off with Mahomed at my heels, wondering what sort of a reception I would meet with (if any) or if my experiences at the mother house of this Order near Temacin, would be repeated and all the inhabitants vanish into strict seclusion on my arrival. Matters certainly did not look promising as we neared the group of buildings which seemed even more extensive and mysterious than those of the Zaouïa of Tamelhat and were outlined against an opalescent sky tinted amethyst and pink.

On one side of the road large gates opened on to a wide, square courtyard, beyond which was a high barrack, with tiny apertures far from the ground, which could only be women's quarters. In confirmation of this, a few coarse negresses — slaves to

all intents and purposes — flaunting their draperies of orange and red came from the doorway and passed me, staring and laughing rudely.

Mahomed had gone off in the opposite direction to seek admission and returned with a servant charged with messages of welcome. The *m'rabet* regretted profoundly that it was the hour of *mogh'reb* and he must conduct prayers in the Mosque, but his sons would take his place and receive me.

This was most satisfactory: a message that unlocked doors and admitted me to the interior of the Zaouïa: into a long, lofty apartment carpeted with soft rugs, ornamented with frescoes and furnished, unfortunately, with chairs, tables and a sofa from France.

My hosts were most affable and actually asked me to remain for a fortnight, a month — as long as I wished! The invitation so staggered me that I hardly knew for the moment what to reply and had I been really sure that they desired it, I would gladly have stayed for a time in that remote, silent, cloistered retreat. Where would they have secluded me?

The room opened on to a high walled garden and after tea we went to see the well — that only partly succeeded in keeping alive the drooping terebinth trees: the friendly pigeons, which circled above our heads and the pet gazelles. These dainty little creatures were kept in netted cages, but the two brothers let them out and played with them, making them race after each other round and round the gar-

den and spring into the air with wonderful lightness and grace. They seemed so little afraid of us and so accustomed to this game, that I came to the conclusion it was not merely an entertainment for my benefit, though I would hardly have suspected that my very grave and dignified hosts condescended to such infantine pursuits.

All the time I was wishing that I might visit the ladies, but it is such bad manners to mention them, that I refrained from doing so; and this, not only at the Zaouïa, but also at the Caïd's. He too invited me to prolong my visit till Achoûrâ, when the girls and the divorced women — all who are free — hold a swinging festival amongst the palm trees in honour (did they but know it) of the sun.

Perhaps, with luck, I may find my way back, via Tunis, to Guémar. It is a beautiful village at any time, and, from the terrace of the Caïd's house at dawn, it was a dream.

An hour later I was in the saddle surrounded by the sand dunes again.

Of those days spent amongst the solitudes, I have brought away ineffaceable memories, which can neither be set down on paper, nor spoken in words. They are of a silence that, for me, was full of sound. It may have been the sand shifting invisibly grain by grain: it may have been the *drinn* shaken by the wind: it may have been, so say the Chambaas,[6] the souls of dead *m'rabets,* who sound their tambourines in the ether betwixt sand and sky.

[6] Nomads.

There was the light: the strange wonders of every sunset and "the blood red cloud of dawn:" the daily twin dramas of the skies: so that, for me, "the evening and the morning made the . . . day."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE STORY OF SI MAHMOUD SAÂDI; A CHILD OF MISFORTUNE

"One day, which is yet far distant, there will enter within your walls a daughter of the stranger, coming from a country where the sun sinks every night in the heavens . . . This woman will become a child of Islam, for she will have renouneed the errors of her people and she will share the couch of a true believer."

PROPHECY OF THE M'RABET SIDI ABD-EL-QUADER-EL-GOUGUI, WHO DIED AT TEMACIN.

IN the dawn of this century, when the Sahara and the intimate life of its inhabitants were still wrapped in a profound mystery for the majority of Europeans, French literature was enriched by the writings of a young Tunisian scholar, who travelled in Oran, ostensibly seeking enlightenment on certain points of the Faith of Islam and visiting the Zaouïas of the South.

Some contributions to *"Akhbar,"* a North African journal, which were the result of these wanderings, are veritable prose poems giving, in the most beautiful, expressive language and with wonderful visualising power, impressions of life in the Koranic Colleges.

Nor was that all. The Si Mahmoud-ould-Ali, who frequented the religious schools and who became an initiate of the Kadrya, wearing, and recognised by the rosary of that Order, had already been a wanderer on the Hauts Plateaux, in the Tunisian Sahel, in the Sahara of Constantine and was more generally known as Si Mahmoud Saâdi. Under this pseudonym the young student of letters noted down the lives of Berber and Jew, of soldier, *fellah* [1] and nomad, and — more than that — had actually been a dweller in tents, sharing the bread of the Saharien; had served as a Cavalier du Makhzen; had borne the insupportable rays of a pitiless August sun in the Desert, shaded only by the cupolas of El-Oued.

Rejoicing in a life of physical and mental freedom unknown to Europe; unhampered by the prejudices, the conventions and the pettiness of cities and greatly enamoured of this enchanted country, no one was better qualified to picture it for the civilised world.

Welcomed everywhere and even reverenced by the people for a practised acquaintance with the healing art, due to earlier and discontinued study, no one had better opportunities for getting at the very heart of things kept hidden by a secretive race, nor greater facility in materialising this intimate knowledge in words gilded by the magic of genius.

Yet, in point of fact, it was no Tunisian scholar who led this varied strange career: neither Si Mah-

[1] Tiller of the soil.

From "Notes de Route"
By Courtesy of M. E. Fasquelle

Si Mahmoud Saâdi

moud-ould-Ali, nor Si Mahmoud-Saâdi ever existed except as a disguise and on paper. These were but noms de plume used by the real writer, a Russian and a woman.

She was such a young woman too — just a mere girl — when she elected to identify herself with "the Republic of the Sand." Perhaps it was the Faith of Islam, which she professed, that attracted her to dwell with followers of the Prophet, rather than with Christians. Perhaps it was her dire poverty which drove her out of Europe to be amongst those yet poorer than herself. Perhaps it was that she might escape in the solitudes the stigma which tradition, with cruel strange injustice, insists shall be attached to the child whose parents have sinned in bringing it into the world.

Her mother, Natalie d'Eberhardt, widow of General de Moërder, had quitted Russia for Geneva in 1873 and it was four years later, in the house of her great uncle, a political exile, that Isabelle Eberhardt was born.

The little fatherless girl had opened her eyes on life in the home of an eccentric, a misanthrope; but a man of liberal ideas and high culture. When she had passed out of the baby stage, he appointed himself her tutor; educated and trained her as if she had been a boy. At eighteen she was able to write with facility in four languages; French, Russian, German and Arabic and, having the run of a savant's library, she had ample opportunity to develop her literary gifts. She began to study medicine as a

career, but as soon as she was absolutely free to make her own choice, she abandoned it for literature.—" I write, as I love," she said in a letter from Bône, " probably because such is my destiny, and it is my only consolation." The taste was inherited from her mother, also a writer, but whose work has been entirely eclipsed by that of her more brilliant child.

It was in 1897 that mother and daughter went together to the shores of North Africa, to Bône. Why they did so has never been definitely stated, to my knowledge, but it might have been on account of Madame de Moërder's failing health, and she died there in less than a twelvemonth after their arrival. Isabelle had, in the meantime, devoted herself to study and to completely mastering the language of the country. She also entered into correspondence with M. Ali Abdul-Wahab, a well known man of letters, who instructed her on certain questions of the Mussulman faith, which she had been unable to comprehend. Her mother, a Russian Christian, also became a Mahomedan and was buried in the little cemetery at Bône under the name " before Allah " of Fathima Manoubia.

Could there be a stranger psychological mystery than that enveloping these two women? Why should they adopt a belief so manifestly created by man for the benefit of man alone? It is almost inconceivable that Isabelle could be a follower of Mahomet and yet write: " When women become

the comrades of men, when they cease to be his playthings; what a different existence will be theirs! Meantime they are taught to breathe to order, to the rhythm of a valse." She too, who openly expressed her horror of all forms of slavery! It seems like attempting to run life along two rails, diametrically opposed to one another: yet, there is no doubt that many men and women try, at all events, to reconcile themselves to such a course. Was the treatment of woman by the Mussulman one of the questions she could not understand and referred to M. Abdul-Wahab? If so, it must have been something of a poser, but presumably he answered it with oriental subtlety and she was but twenty years of age.

After her mother's death Isabelle Eberhardt returned to Geneva and remained with her great uncle until he also died, leaving her absolutely alone in the world with but a small sum of money. Little wonder that she turned her back on a town, which only held sad memories and was lured to Africa by its beauty and its sunshine, which had so appealed to her artistic, ardent temperament. The nomad spirit of a Russian ancestry that had traversed the steppe of her parents' country stirred strongly within her. "From my youth," she said, "I realised the great earth and I longed to reach its furthermost ends. I was not built to turn round in a ring with silken blinkers on." When she went south, she fell an easy prey to its enchantment and

could not rest content with Biskra, which even in the charm of earlier days could but suggest the completer radiance which lies beyond.

There is no doubt, too, that her literary ambition had been fired by Fromentin's "Un Eté dans le Sahara" and that the romantic word painting of a landscape artist had strongly influenced her decision to go to the Great Desert in summer. "Perhaps you have guessed," she had previously written to the same friend, when she was at Bône with her mother, "that in my case, the ambition to make a name and a position by my pen (such as I have little confidence in doing and can hardly hope for) ranks only second in my life." It was destined to become her only one, so she went to Oued Souf because it was, as she joyfully announced, a country which had never yet appeared in print.

Unfortunately for Isabelle Eberhardt she was a puzzle to her own sex and the other. She said herself:—"Women do not understand me: they look upon me as a strange creature. I am too simple for their taste, which is only attracted by artifice and artificiality." Men, with a few notable exceptions, found her equally mysterious. It was incomprehensible to them, that a young girl could prefer a career of hardship and danger (such as many a man might shrink from encountering) to their polite attentions. They were unaware, of course, how much her birth and early unusual training had to do with her apparent eccentricities: and that, young though she was, she had already greatly suffered.

As for the authorities in the south of Algeria, they did not know what to make of her. She had cast convention to the winds by dressing like an Arab man, because she delighted in the picturesqueness of the clothing, and considered it more suitable for the life and the country than the garments of a European woman. They enquired if she were an English Methodist, and her assurances that she was a Russian and a Mussulman only seemed to complicate matters further. That she should apply for permission to go to El Oued in summer was the climax. No doubt they thought her mad.

Still, the Capitaine de Susbielle, who was en route to Touggourt, offered her the protection of his convoy, which at first she gladly accepted. Before starting, however, she discovered he was not in sympathy with the natives and disliked by them, so that she was forced to make her excuses to him on the plea of important letters that had been delayed. In order to prosecute her studies, unhampered by the distrust of the Arabs, it was absolutely essential not to alienate them by identifying herself, in any particular, with this officer. Letting the convoy get well away in advance and sinking her personality in the disguise of Si Mahmoud Saâdi the Tunisian scholar, Isabelle Eberhardt left Biskra on the 18th of July, 1899, for Touggourt, accompanied by two guides.

She had a dreadful journey: sleeping in the middle of the steppe unsheltered; suffering from fever and thirst and just escaped being lost in one of the

salt lakes, dried up superficially by the sun, which are terrible deathtraps for the unwary traveller. On the sixth day she arrived at Touggourt and after a rest, reached her destination in the Souf on the 3rd August, already ill with fever: a bad beginning for a sojourn in the Desert.

It cannot be suggested that the adoption of male attire, nor her magnificent horsemanship, deceived the educated Arabs, as to her sex, nor the *m'rabets* at the heads of the Zaouïas she visited, with their quick instinct and peculiar insight into the minutiæ of temperament. Therefore it says much for their innate high bred courtesy and for her own personality that they were content to receive Si Mahmoud on the unchallenged representations of letters of introduction presented to them. Always bitterly resenting curiosity themselves, they were willing not to inquire into the motives of this pose of their unusual guest, but respected her silence and betrayed neither surprise, nor resentment at her disguise. Moreover it was a Mussulman who asked their hospitality and their instruction.

On the other hand the young Tunisian scholar's rôle was so well played amongst the ignorant, the *nomad,* the *fellah,* the Spahi, the Bédouine, the dancer and the casual traveller of the steppe and the sand dunes that, unobserved and unsuspected, the Russian girl could read the pages of a book sealed for any other European — man or woman. In addition she had the immense advantage of being their veritable co-religionist, wearing the chaplet of

the Kadrya. Never anticipating the tragic results that were to ensue, Isabelle Eberhardt received her initiation into this Order at the hands of the Sheikh Sidi Elhoussine ben Brahim at Guémar, during her second visit to the Souf in the summer of 1900.

Her first stay at El Oued had been curtailed by bad attacks of fever, which sent her back to Europe, where she stayed at Marseilles for a fortnight with her half brother, Augustin de Moërder and afterwards in Paris, Italy and Sardinia: an unhappy restless spirit. In a short time she was overcome by nostalgia of the Desert, of "my Sahara," as she called it, "that I so love, and with a love obscure, mysterious, profound, inexplicable, but very real and indestructible." She sought its shelter again, fleeing from the cruelty of an unsympathetic, mocking world and tried to drown her misery in the flood of radiance, which illumines the South, and in its peace which is nigh unto that of Nirvanah. She could not, and sought to put a finish to a lonely life, but her hand was stayed by an Arab, who adored her, Si Sliman Ehnni, Maréchal of Spahis. In October they were married according to Mussulman rites: an alliance which rumour asserts was a *mariage blanc*. If she had hoped by this means to establish a raison d'être for her continued residence at El Oued, this poor child of misfortune was doomed to disappointment.

From time to time there had been friction between her and the authorities, some of whom seemed to imagine she was "a danger to the public security"

because, as she herself expressed it, she "preferred a *burnous* to a petticoat and the sand hills to the domestic hearth." Now they refused their sanction to a civil union between herself and Sliman Ehnni and, in the following year, seized a loophole of excuse to exile her from the country of her adoption, which she so loved and had delighted to honour with her pen.

In justice to the authorities it must be said that doubtless she was an anxiety as a foreign subject and owing to her eccentric mode of life, so that when an attempt was made to assassinate her, they were glad of the opportunity to cry "finis" to her wanderings in the South.

It was towards the close of January 1901, at the little village of Behima, about eight miles north of El Oued, that Isabelle Eberhardt was attacked by a madman, who struck her a violent blow on the head (fortunately protected by the hood of her *burnous*) and also on her left arm, which was severely injured. At the enquiry, held at Constantine in the following June, the fanatic declared that he had not struck a European but "a Mussulman under a divine impulse." His victim gave it as her opinion that, in all probability, her assailant had been incited to kill her by the *Khouans* [2] of the Tidjanïa, to which Order he belonged. She explained that they wished to be rid of her, for the reason that she had joined their enemies, the Hadrïa, who, realising this, were overcome by dismay when they heard of the crime.

[2] Brothers.

It was a mystery of the Sahara, that can never be satisfactorily solved.

For Isabelle Eberhardt, it was a tragedy. Despite the protests of the Press, she was expelled from Algeria and her own Consulate refused to help her. When she demanded their reason, she was told that Arab male dress was unsuitable attire for a young Russian lady.

Thus suddenly deprived of her means of subsistence as a journalist, contributing to Algerian papers her impressions of life in the south, and without other resources, Isabelle sought refuge with her uncle (her mother's brother) at Marseilles and there worked at the docks as a porter. Of these days of utter wretchedness and destitution and of her experiences she has given some account in her novel "Trimadeur."

They did not last long, happily. Again Sliman Ehnni went to her rescue. They were married by civil rite at Marseilles and this enabled her to return to the land of her adoption in February 1902, as the wife of a naturalised Frenchman. He had retired from soldiering and obtained a post at Ténès as secretary and interpreter.

It was after this return that Isabelle Eberhardt as Si Mahmoud-ould-Ali travelled to the south of Oran to visit the zaouïas; that she served as a soldier, wearing the blue *burnous* of the Mokhazni; that she was insubordinate and took her punishment — knowing it to be just — as it behoves a brave woman, respecting the officer who ordered it de-

spite her sex, and subsequently counting him amongst her best friends.

Notwithstanding the sympathy and esteem shown to her by the Administrator at Ténès, M. Bouchot, public opinion was so strongly against Isabelle Eberhardt that her life was rendered almost intolerable at Ténès and in 1904 she was again seized by a longing for the sand dunes of the south. She went as guide and interpreter to Figuig; and then alone to Beni-Ounif, Béchar and Kenadsa, but fever drove her back to the Hauts Plateaux, to a village lying on the left bank of the Oued Aïn-Sefra, which she was destined never to leave.

In the autumn, though still suffering from fever, she wrote to Sliman Ehnni that she was better and there was no cause for anxiety. Nevertheless he, devoted and faithful as ever, fearing he knew not what, joined her in October. The rains in that little village encircled by mountains, always break with violence and on the 21st the "yellow spring" had become a foaming torrent; had burst its bounds and rushed in amongst the houses.

It was in the early morning that this happened and Isabelle Eberhardt was on the upper floor, pouring out coffee, when she became aware of the sudden inundation. Tearing down a plank from the roof she called to Sliman Ehnni to save himself on this raft; that she was all right and could swim. Her anxiety on his behalf helped to destroy her. As she reached the stair head the house collapsed and she lay buried in the ruins.

Thus suddenly, tragically, Si Mahmoud Saâdi passed out of existence and a hapless girl of twenty-seven found a grave amongst the sand dunes she had so dearly loved.

Though she rests for ever in a tomb at Aïn-Sefra, I claim that her life-story belongs to the Souf, where she first realised the enchantment of the African Desert and where the fierce rays of a burning sun set alight the torch of her genius.

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